

FAMOUS PLAYS
of 1937

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A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY

IVAN S. TURGENEV

JUDGMENT DAY

ELMER RICE

BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON

DOROTHY L. SAYERS
AND M. ST. CLARE BYRNE

IN THEATRE STREET

H. R. LENORMAND

THE WOMEN

CLARE BOOTHE

PEOPLE IN LOVE

ARTHUR REID

LONDON
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD

1937

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

A word may be said about *The Women* by Clare Boothe, as the title of this play may not yet be familiar to English readers.

The Women is what is known as the "smash hit" of the contemporary American stage.

V.G.

A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY

Ivan S. Turgenev

A MONTH
IN THE COUNTRY

A Comedy in Five Acts

Translated from the Russian by

M. S. MANDELL

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CHARACTERS

ARKADĬ (ARKASHA) SERGIEICH ISLAEV, a rich land-owner, 36 years.

NATALIA (NATASHA) PETROVNA, his wife, 29 years.

KOLIA, their son, 10 years.

VIERA (VIEROCHKA) ALEKSANDROVNA, a foundling, 17 years.

ANNA SEMENOVNA ISLAEVA, Islaev's mother, 58 years.

LIZAVETA (LIZA) BOGDANOVNA, companion, 37 years.

ADAM IVANOVICH SCHAAF, a German tutor, 45 years.

MIKHAIL (MICHEL) ALEKSANDROVICH (ALEKSANDRYCH) RAKITIN, a friend of the family, 30 years.

ALEKSIEĬ NIKOLAEVICH (NIKOLAICH) BIELIAEV, a student, 21 years, Kolia's teacher.

AFANASIĬ IVANOVICH (IVANYCH) BOLSHINTSOV, a neighbour, 40 years.

IGNATIĬ ILICH SHPIGELSKI, a doctor, 40 years.

MATVIEĬ, a man-servant.

KATIA (KATERINA) VASILEVNA, servant girl, 29 years.

The action takes place in ISLAEV's estate, at the beginning of the forties. Between the first and second, second and third, fourth and fifth acts, a day passes.

The stage represents a sitting-room. On the right, a door, leading to the office, and a card-table near by. Straight ahead, a door leading to the reception-room. On the left, two windows and a round carved table between them. Large divans in the corners. Around the card-table, are sitting ANNA SEMENOVNA, LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA, and SCHAAF. They are playing Preference. At the round table, are NATALIA PETROVNA and RAKITIN. NATALIA PETROVNA is sewing on some canvas. RAKITIN has a book in his hand. The wall-clock shows three o'clock.

ACT I

SCHAAF: Harz. (Hearts.)

ANNA SEMENOVNA: What ! Again ? If you keep on, my dear man, you will make a clean sweep.

SCHAAF (*phlegmatically*): Eight, in hearts.

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*to LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA*): He's terrible. It's impossible to play with him.

[LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA *smiles*.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*to RAKITIN*): Why did you stop ? Read on.

RAKITIN (*slowly raising his head*): " Monte Cristo se redressa haletant . . ." Natalia Petrovna, does this interest you ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Not a bit.

RAKITIN: Then why are we reading it ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: For this reason: A day or two ago a lady asked me, " Have you read *Monte Cristo* ? " and added, " Oh, read it ! It is beautiful." I didn't say anything to her at the time, but now I can tell her that I have read it and that I saw no beauty in it.

RAKITIN: Well, if you have already succeeded in convincing yourself——

NATALIA PETROVNA: Oh, what a lazy fellow you are !

RAKITIN: On the contrary, I am willing—— (*He finds the place where he stopped.*) " Se redressa haletant, et . . . "

NATALIA PETROVNA (*interrupting him*): Have you seen Arkadi to-day ?

RAKITIN: I met him at the dike. It is being fixed. He was saying something to the workman, and to bring his idea out clearer, he got into the sand up to his knees.

NATALIA PETROVNA: He takes to everything

with such enthusiasm. He tries awfully hard. I deem that a fault. What do you think?

RAKITIN: I fully agree with you.

NATALIA PETROVNA: How tiresome! You always agree with me. Read on.

RAKITIN: You want me, then, to disagree with you? Very well.

NATALIA PETROVNA: I want—I want! I want you to feel that way. Go on, read.

RAKITIN: Yes, ma'am. (*Takes up the book.*)

SCHAAF: Hearts.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: What! Again? That's unbearable. Natasha! Natasha!

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well?

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Just imagine! Schaaf has beaten us completely. Just think, he had seven and eight hearts.

SCHAAF: Und chust now, zieben. (Seven.)

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Do you hear? That's awful!

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes, that is awful.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Well, go on. (*To NATALIA PETROVNA*) Where is Kolia?

NATALIA PETROVNA: He went out for a walk with his new teacher.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Ah, Lizaveta Bogdanovna! I invite you——

RAKITIN (*to NATALIA PETROVNA*): With which teacher?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you that we have hired a new teacher, without consulting you.

RAKITIN: In Dufer's place?

NATALIA PETROVNA: No, a teacher of Russian. A French teacher, the Princess will send us from Moscow.

RAKITIN: What's this Russian teacher—an old man?

NATALIA PETROVNA: No, a young man. We hired him just for the summer.

RAKITIN: Oh, just during vacation.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes, that's what they call it, vacation. And, do you know, Rakitin, you like to observe people, to analyse them and to dig into their innermost—

RAKITIN: What makes you think so?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Never mind what makes me think so. Turn your attention to him, a little bit. I like him very much. He's slim, tall, has a lively look and a daring expression. You'll see! He's a little clumsy, and that may not suit you.

RAKITIN: Natalia Petrovna! You are persecuting me awfully, to-day.

NATALIA PETROVNA: No, all joking aside, pay a little attention to him. It seems to me that he will make a famous man. However, the Lord only knows that.

RAKITIN: You are arousing my curiosity.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Really? (*Thoughtfully.*) Read on.

RAKITIN: "Se redressa haletant, et . . ."

NATALIA PETROVNA (*turning around suddenly*): Where is Viera? I haven't seen her since morning. (*Smiling at RAKITIN*) Drop the book. I can see that we won't succeed in reading to-day. You'd better talk to me.

RAKITIN: Very well, but what shall I talk about? Do you know that I passed several days at Krinitsyn's? Just imagine, the young people are lonesome already.

NATALIA PETROVNA: What made you think so?

RAKITIN: It was very evident. Lonesomeness cannot be covered up. Everything else may be, perhaps, but not that.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*looking at him*): Everything else can be hidden?

RAKITIN (*after a moment's silence*): I think so.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*opening her eyes*): What were you doing at Krinityn's?

RAKITIN: Nothing. It's terrible to be with friends who are lonesome. One feels free, unmolested, loves them, has no cause to get mad; still the gloom oppresses, and one's heart aches, and one feels an undefinable craving.

NATALIA PETROVNA: You undoubtedly see the gloomy side with your friends quite often.

RAKITIN: As though you don't know what it means—the presence of a man whom you love and who is tiresome.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*slowly*): "Whom you love"! That's a far-reaching expression. You are talking very wisely to-day.

RAKITIN: Wisely? Why wisely?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Because that's one of your faults. Do you know, Rakitin, you are quite wise, but—(*slowly*)—sometimes we talk in circles? Have you ever seen how circles are made? Circles go round and round without getting anywhere. It's tiresome and the thought of fresh air is a very welcome thing after such a pastime.

RAKITIN: Natalia Petrovna! You are, to-day——

NATALIA PETROVNA: What?

RAKITIN: You are offended with me, to-day.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Oh, you sensitive people! How little you comprehend, though you are sensitive. No, I am not offended with you.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Ah, finally you have lost. Natasha! Our villain has lost!

SCHAAF: Lisafet Bogdanovna! I have guilt.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: I beg your pardon. I couldn't tell that Anna Semenovna had no hearts.

SCHAAF: In the future, I, Lisafet Bogdanovna, do not invite——

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*to SCHAAF*): What is she to blame for?

SCHAAF: In the future, I, Lisafet Bogdanovna, do not invite.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: What have I to do with it? Nonsense!

RAKITIN: The more I look at you to-day, Natalia Petrovna, the less I recognise your face.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with some curiosity*): Really?

RAKITIN: Truly. I see quite a change in you.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes? If that is the case, please—— You know me. Guess, then. What does this change mean? What has happened to me?

RAKITIN: Give me a little time.

[*KOLIA runs in, noisily, from the sitting-room, straight up to ANNA SEMENOVNA.*

KOLIA: Grandma! Grandma! See what I've got. (*He shows her a bow and arrow.*) Look!

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Let's see, my dear. Oh, what a fine bow. Who made it for you?

KOLIA: He. (*Points to BIELIAEV, who has remained in the doorway.*)

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Oh, how nicely he has made it for you.

KOLIA: I shot twice with it, and struck the tree both times. (*Jumps for joy.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA: Let's see it, Kolia.

KOLIA (*runs up to her, and NATALIA PETROVNA examines the bow*): Oh, Mamma! You ought to see how Aleksiei Nikolaich climbed the trees! He wants to teach me how to climb, too, and he wants to teach me how to swim. He'll teach me everything. (*Jumps joyfully.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA (*to BIELIAEV*): I am very much obliged to you for your attention to Kolia——

KOLIA (*interrupting her*): I love him very much, Mamma, very much.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*caressing his head*): He is a delicate little child. Train him to be alert and strong.

[BIELIAEV bows.

KOLIA: Aleksiei Nikolaich! Let's go to the stable and take some bread to Favourite.

BIELIAEV: All right. Let's go.

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*to KOLIA*): Come here and kiss me, first.

KOLIA (*running away*): Afterwards, Grandma, afterwards.

[*Runs into the sitting-room. BIELIAEV follows him.*

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*looking after KOLIA*): What a lovely child! (*To SCHAAF and LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA*) Isn't he lovely?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: Yes.

SCHAAF (*after a moment's silence*): I pass.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with a vivacious look at RAKITIN*): Well, how did he impress you?

RAKITIN: Who?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*after a moment's silence*): That teacher of Russian.

RAKITIN: Oh, pardon me, I forgot all about him.

I was pre-occupied with the question which you had put to me before.

[NATALIA PETROVNA looks at him and smiles, faintly.]

However, his face, surely—— Yes, he has a nice face. I like him all right, only he seems to me to be very shy.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes, you are right.

RAKITIN (*looking at her*): No, I still cannot account to myself——

NATALIA PETROVNA: How would it be if you and I should take an interest in him? Do you want to? Let us put the finishing touches to his education. This is a most excellent occasion for settled, sensible people, such as you and I are. We are very sensible, are we not?

RAKITIN: That young man seems to interest you. If he only knew about it, he'd be quite conceited.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Oh, believe me, not a bit of it. You can't judge him by what one of your kind would do in his place. He isn't one bit like us. That's just where the trouble lies, my dear friend. We are studying ourselves very diligently and so we think we know others.

RAKITIN: Another's heart is like a dark wood. But why these hints? Why do you tantalise me so?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Whom shall I tantalise, if not my friends? And you are one of my friends, and you know it, too. (*She presses his hand.* RAKITIN *smiles radiantly.*) You are an old friend of mine.

RAKITIN: I am somewhat afraid, though, that you'll soon sicken of this old friend of yours.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*smiling*): Only sweet things are sickening.

RAKITIN: That's possible, only it doesn't make it any easier for the friend.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Enough! (*Lowering her voice.*) As though you don't know ce que vous êtes pour moi.

RAKITIN: Natalia Petrovna! You are playing with me as a cat does with a mouse—but the mouse does not complain.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Poor little mouse!

ANNA SEMENOVNA: You owe me twenty, Adam Ivanych. Aha!

SCHAAF: In der future, Lisafet Bogdanovna, I do not invite.

[MATVIEI enters from the sitting-room and announces

MATVIEI: Ignati Ilich has arrived.

SHPIGELSKI (*entering after him*): Doctors are not announced.

[MATVIEI goes out.

My regards to the whole family. (*Goes up to ANNA SEMENOVNA and takes her hand.*) How are you, Madam? I hope you are the winner.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: I am not the winner. I have just got back my own. Thank the Lord for that. That villain is the winner. (*Points to SCHAAF.*)

SHPIGELSKI (*to SCHAAF*): Adam Ivanych! That isn't the way to play with ladies. I really don't recognise you.

SCHAAF (*murmuring to himself*): Mit der ladies!

SHPIGELSKI (*going up to the round table*): How do you do, Natalia Petrovna? How do you do, Mikhail Aleksandrovich?

NATALIA PETROVNA: How do you do, doctor? How are you?

SHPIGELSKI: I like the last question very much, for it means that you are well. And as to how I am, well, a respectable doctor is never sick. If every anything happens to him, he dies at once, and that is all. Ha ! ha !

NATALIA PETROVNA: Sit down. I am well, only I am not in good spirits. That is also a kind of sickness, isn't it ?

[SHPIGELSKI *sits down near* NATALIA PETROVNA.]

SHPIGELSKI: Let me feel your pulse. (*Feels her pulse.*) Oh, these nerves of yours ! You are not out in the air enough, Natalia Petrovna. You don't laugh enough, that's what is the trouble. Mikhail Aleksandrovich ! Why are you looking at me ? Well, I will prescribe some drops for you.

NATALIA PETROVNA: I have no objections to laughing. (*Vivaciously.*) You, doctor, have a malicious tongue, and I like you and respect you for that. Tell us something funny. Mikhail Aleksandrovich is quite serious to-day.

SHPIGELSKI (*stealthily looking at* RAKITIN): It seems that not only are the nerves unstrung, but your liver is also a little out of order.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well, you are reaching out pretty far. You can observe all you like, but don't say it so openly. We know very well that you are quite penetrating. In fact, both of you are quite penetrating.

SHPIGELSKI: I guess so.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Tell us something funny.

SHPIGELSKI: Yes, ma'am. But to tell a story without thinking it up ! Let's have a snuff of tobacco first. (*Snuffs.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA: What funny preparatory measures !

SHPIGELSKI: You must know, Natalia Petrovna,

that there are all kinds of funny stories, and what suits one doesn't suit another. For instance, your neighbour, Mr. Khlopushkin, will laugh and cry at my wiggling this finger, but you—— Well, do you know Verenitsyn, Platon Vasilevich ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: I think I do, or I have heard of him.

SHPIGELSKI: He has a crazy sister, and in my opinion, they are either both crazy or they are both sane, for there is absolutely no difference between them. But that isn't the point. Fate, fate in everything. This Verenitsyn has a daughter, kind of a green little girl, with pale eyes, red little nose and yellow teeth. In a word, she is a very amiable young lady. She plays the piano and lisps. That goes to show that everything is in apple-pie order. And her father apportioned her a dowry of two hundred serfs, and her aunt is giving her a hundred and fifty. Her aunt is still alive, and according to all evidence, will live long, for all crazy people have long lives. However, there is a remedy for that. She made out a will in favour of her niece, and only recently, I myself treated her by pouring cold water over her head, and my treatment was useless, because to cure her was an impossibility. Well, then, Verenitsyn's daughter was quite a desirable bride. He brought her out in society, and fellows ran after her. Among them was a fellow by the name of Perekuzov, a poor-blooded young fellow, very timid, but with most admirable habits. The father liked the young man very much, and the girl did too. It seemed that there would be no trouble in making a match, and truly, everything went along nicely. Mr. Verenitsyn was quite attracted by this young man and became very friendly with him, but suddenly there appeared, from no one knows where, an army officer, by the name of Ardalion Protobekasov. At a ball,

given by the marshal of the nobility, this officer saw Verenitsyn's daughter, danced with her three times, and said to her, with his eyes rolled up at her, "Oh, how happy I am!" The young lady lost her head at once. She cried and sighed after him. She didn't look at Perekuzov any more, and she didn't talk to him any more, and the word marriage threw her into hysterics. Oh, Lord, what an end! Well, Verenitsyn thought if Protobekasov must be the man, so be it. As it was, he was a man well fixed. They began to invite him, to pay their respects to him, so to say. Protobekasov accepted the invitations, and honoured them with his presence. He came, stayed long, loved much, and finally, offered his hand and heart. And what do you think? The young lady accepted him at once, with pleasure. Then, tears, sighs, and hysterics followed anew. The father was overcome by it. He asked, "What do you want?" And what do you think she answered? "Papa, I don't know which I love, this man or the other." "How's that?" asked the father, and the daughter answered that, so help her God, she didn't know, and she'd rather not marry anyone, though she loved them both. Verenitsyn, as it may well be imagined, immediately got the fits, and the fellows, too. And she insisted on her own way. Well, now you can judge for yourself, what peculiar things come to pass, in our midst.

NATALIA PETROVNA: I don't see anything peculiar in it. Don't you think a girl can love two men at the same time?

RAKITIN: Oh, you think so——

NATALIA PETROVNA (*slowly*): I think—— However, I don't know—— It is possible, that a state of affairs like that only goes to prove that the girl doesn't love either one.

SHPIGELSKI (*snuffing tobacco and alternately looking*

at NATALIA PETROVNA and RAKITIN): Is that so ? Is that so ?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*vivaciously, to SHPIGELSKI*): Your story was very good. Nevertheless, you haven't made me laugh.

SHPIGELSKI: My dear Madam ! Who could make you laugh now ? Laughing is everything, but not what you need at present.

NATALIA PETROVNA: What do I need now ?

SHPIGELSKI (*with a forced, quiet air*): Only the Lord knows.

NATALIA PETROVNA: How unresponsive you are to-day ! You aren't a bit better than Rakitin.

SHPIGELSKI: That's quite a compliment.

[NATALIA PETROVNA *makes an impatient movement.*

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*getting up*): Well, finally—— (*Sighs.*) Oh, my ! My feet have gone to sleep. Oh !

[LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA and SCHAAF *get up.*

NATALIA PETROVNA (*getting up and going towards them*): Why do you sit still so long ?

[SHPIGELSKI and RAKITIN *get up.*

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*to SCHAAF*): You owe us seventy kopeks.

[SCHAAF *bows.*

(*continuing*): You can't win all the time. (*To NATALIA PETROVNA*) You look pale to-day, Natasha. Are you well ? Shpigelski, is she well ?

SHPIGELSKI (*who was talking inaudibly to RAKITIN*): Quite well.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: That's good. I am going to have a little rest before dinner. I am dead tired. Liza ! Come—— Oh, my feet, my feet !

[*She and LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA go into the sitting-room. NATALIA PETROVNA escorts them to*

the door. SHPIGELSKI, RAKITIN, and SCHAAF remain.

SHPIGELSKI (*offering SCHAAF his snuff box*): Well, Adam Ivanych, vi-befinden-zi zich? (*Wie befinden Sie sich?*)

SCHAAF (*snuffing tobacco*): Gut. Und you?

SHPIGELSKI: 'Thank you, I'm getting along. (*Semi-audibly to RAKITIN*) So you don't know exactly what is the matter with Natalia Petrovna to-day?

RAKITIN: Truly, I don't.

SHPIGELSKI: If you don't know—— (*He turns around and goes to meet NATALIA PETROVNA as she returns.*) Ah, I have a little business with you, Natalia Petrovna.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*going up to the window*): Is that so? What is the business?

SHPIGELSKI: I want to talk to you alone.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Is that so? You are frightening me.

[RAKITIN, who has taken SCHAAF by his arm, walks to and fro across the stage with him, and whispers something to him in German. SCHAAF laughs, and mutters, "Ja, ja, ja! Ja wohl, ja wohl! Sehr gut."

SHPIGELSKI: The business doesn't really concern you only.

NATALIA PETROVNA: But what do you want to say?

SHPIGELSKI: This is what I want to say. A good acquaintance of mine wants me to find out—that is, he wants me to ask your intentions concerning your charge, Viera Aleksandrovna.

NATALIA PETROVNA: My intentions?

SHPIGELSKI: That is—to speak frankly, without any hidden thoughts, my acquaintance——

NATALIA PETROVNA: Is he trying to win her affections?

SHPIGELSKI: That's it.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Are you joking?

SHPIGELSKI: Not at all.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*laughing*): But she is only a child. What a peculiar commission you have undertaken!

SHPIGELSKI: Why is it peculiar, Natalia Petrovna? My friend——

NATALIA PETROVNA: You're quite active, Shpigelski. Who is your friend?

SHPIGELSKI (*smiling*): But you haven't yet told me anything definite concerning——

NATALIA PETROVNA: Stop your nonsense, doctor. Viera is still a child. You know that yourself, Mr. Diplomat. (*Turning around.*) Oh, by the way, here she is, herself.

[VIERA and KOLIA run in from the sitting-room.

KOLIA (*running up to RAKITIN*): Rakitin, tell them to give us some paste.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*to VIERA*): Where have you come from? (*Caresses her cheek.*) How hot your face is!

VIERA: From the garden. (*SHPIGELSKI bows to her.*) How do you do, Ignati Ilich?

RAKITIN (*to KOLIA*): What do you want the paste for?

KOLIA: I need it, I need it. Aleksiei Nikolaich is making a kite for me. Tell them——

RAKITIN (*trying to ring*): Hold on, wait a minute.

SCHAAF: Erlauben Sie! Mr. Kolia, to-day his lesson didn't read. (*Takes KOLIA by the hand.*) Kommen Sie!

KOLIA (*mournfully*): Morgen, Herr Schaaf, morgen.

SCHAAF (*sharply*): "Morgen, Morgen, nur nicht heute, sagen alle faule Leute." Kommen Sie!

[KOLIA *doesn't move*.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*to VIERA*): Whom have you been walking around with? I haven't seen you since morning.

VIERA: With Aleksiei Nikolaich and Kolia.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*turning around*): Kolia! What does this mean?

KOLIA (*in a low voice*): Mamma! Herr Schaaf——

RAKITIN (*to NATALIA PETROVNA*): He is busy with the kite, and Schaaf wants him to do his lesson.

SCHAAF: Gnädige Frau!——

NATALIA PETROVNA (*to KOLIA*): You must mind. You have played enough for to-day. Go with Herr Schaaf.

SCHAAF (*taking KOLIA into the sitting-room*): Es ist unerhört!

KOLIA (*whispering to RAKITIN on his way out*): You get the paste for me, anyway.

[RAKITIN *assents with his head*.

SCHAAF (*pulling KOLIA after him*): Kommen Sie, mein Herr!

[*They go into the sitting-room. RAKITIN follows them in.*

NATALIA PETROVNA (*to VIERA*): Sit down. You must be tired. (*Sits down herself.*)

VIERA (*sitting down*): No, I am not tired.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*smiling at SHPIGELSKI*): Shpigelski! Look at her, doesn't she look tired?

SHPIGELSKI: That means health, Viera Aleksandrovna.

NATALIA PETROVNA: I am not talking about that. (*To VIERA*) Well, what did you do in the garden?

VIERA: We played and ran around. At first we were watching to see how they dug the dike, then Aleksiei Nikolaich climbed up the tree after a squirrel. He climbed up so high! Then he began to shake the top. We were scared almost to death, watching him. The squirrel finally fell down and the dog almost caught it. However, it got away.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*smiling and looking at SHPIGELSKI*): And then?

VIERA: Then Aleksiei Nikolaich made a bow for Kolia. And he made it so quickly! Then he stealthily walked up to our cow and jumped up on her back. The cow got frightened and started to run, kicking up her hind legs. But he laughed. (*She laughs.*) Then, Aleksiei Nikolaich decided to make a kite and so we came in——

NATALIA PETROVNA (*patting her on the cheek*): Oh, child, oh, child! You are still a child. What do you think, Shpigelski?

SHPIGELSKI (*slowly and looking at NATALIA PETROVNA*): I agree with you.

NATALIA PETROVNA: You had better.

SHPIGELSKI: But that shouldn't stand in the way——on the contrary——.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Do you think so? (*To VIERA*) Well, did you have a jolly time?

VIERA: Yes. Aleksiei Nikolaich is so entertaining!

NATALIA PETROVNA: Is that so? (*After a moment's silence*) Viera! How old are you?

[VIERA looks at her somewhat surprised.]

Oh, child, oh, child !

[RAKITIN comes in from the sitting-room.

SHPIGELSKI (*busily*): Oh, I forgot. Your coachman is sick, and I haven't seen him yet.

NATALIA PETROVNA: What's the matter with him ?

SHPIGELSKI: He has a fever. However, there's nothing dangerous about it.

NATALIA PETROVNA: You are going to have dinner with us, aren't you ?

SHPIGELSKI: If you want me to. (*Goes into the sitting-room.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA: Mon enfant, vous feriez bien de mettre une autre robe pour le diner. (*VIERA gets up.*) Come here (*kisses her forehead.*) My dear child !

[VIERA kisses her hand and goes into the office.

RAKITIN (*softly to VIERA and winking at her*): I sent everything to Aleksiei Nikolaich, everything he needs.

VIERA (*semi-audibly*): Thank you, Mikhail Aleksandrych. (*She goes out.*)

RAKITIN (*goes up to NATALIA PETROVNA. She reaches out her hand. He takes it and presses it hard.*): Finally we are alone, Natalia Petrovna ! Tell me, what is the matter with you ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Nothing, Michel, nothing. And if there had been something, it is all over now. Sit down.

[RAKITIN sits down near her.

Something happens to everybody. There are always little clouds in the sky. Why are you looking at me so ?

RAKITIN: I am looking at you, because it makes me happy.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*smiling at his answer*): Open the window, Michel. The garden is so beautiful.

[RAKITIN *gets up and opens the window.*

Welcome, fresh air ! (*She laughs.*) It seems to have been waiting for the opportunity to blow in. (*Looking around.*) How it fills the whole room ! Now, we can't get it out.

RAKITIN: You are now as quiet and calm as the air after a thunderstorm.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*thoughtfully repeating the last words*): After a thunderstorm. Has there been a thunderstorm ?

RAKITIN (*shaking his head*): It was gathering.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Really ? (*Looking at him, after a moment's pause.*) Do you know, Michel, I cannot imagine a man kinder than you are. (*RAKITIN wants to interrupt her.*) No, don't interrupt me. Let me express myself. You are indulgent, kind, steady. You do not change at all. I am indebted to you for a great deal.

RAKITIN: Natalia Petrovna ! Why are you telling me all this now ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: I don't know. I am feeling good, and resting. So don't forbid me to chatter.

RAKITIN (*caressing her hand*): You are as kind as an angel.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*laughing*): This morning you wouldn't have said that. Listen, Michel ! You know me and you ought to excuse me. Our relationship is so serene, so serious, and yet it is not quite natural. You and I have a moral right to look not only into Arkadi's face but into the face of the whole world. Yes, but—(*thoughtfully*)—and that is precisely what oppresses me and I don't feel right. I feel provoked,

and I am ready, like a child, to give vent to my feelings, and particularly to you. My preference for you doesn't make you angry, does it ?

RAKITIN (*quickly*) : On the contrary.

NATALIA PETROVNA : Yes, sometimes it is quite jolly to torment a beloved one—yes, a beloved one. I, like Tatiana, can say, “Why play unfairly ?”

RAKITIN : Natalia Petrovna ! You——

NATALIA PETROVNA (*interrupting him*) : Yes, I love you, but, do you know, Rakitin, do you know that sometimes it seems to me rather strange. I love you and that feeling is so clear, so peaceful, that it agitates me. It makes me uneasy. But—(*quickly*)—you have never made me weep. And it seems to me that I should have—(*interrupting herself*)—What does it mean ?

RAKITIN (*in a minor tone*) : Such a question does not demand an answer.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*pensively*) : We have been acquainted for some time.

RAKITIN : For four years. Yes, we may be considered old friends.

NATALIA PETROVNA : Friends ! No, you are more than a friend.

RAKITIN : Natalia Petrovna ! Don't touch upon that point. I am afraid for my happiness. I am afraid that it will slip through your fingers.

NATALIA PETROVNA : No, no, no ! The whole point is this—that you are exceptionally kind ; you give in to me too much ; you indulge me excessively. You are unusually kind. Do you hear me ?

RAKITIN (*with a smile*) : Yes, ma'am.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*looking at him*): I don't know how you feel about it, but I am satisfied with such happiness. Many may envy me. (*Stretches her hand to him.*) Isn't it true?

RAKITIN: I am in your power. Do with me whatever you like.

[ISLAEV's voice is heard from the sitting-room, "So you sent for him."

NATALIA PETROVNA (*getting up quickly*): That's he. I can't stay longer. Good-bye. (*Goes into the office.*)

RAKITIN (*looking after her*): What does this mean? Is this the beginning of the end? Or is it the end itself? (*After a moment's silence*) Or is it the beginning?

[ISLAEV enters. He takes off his hat: his face looks careworn.

ISLAEV: How are you, Michel?

RAKITIN: We have seen each other before, this morning.

ISLAEV: I beg your pardon. I am head over heels in worries. (*Paces the room.*) How queer it is! The Russian peasant is very thoughtful, very comprehending. I really respect the Russian peasant, and yet, sometimes, you can talk to him, talk and talk, make it as clear as you can, and nothing will come out of it. The Russian peasant is lacking that—that——

RAKITIN: You are still bothering yourself about the dike?

ISLAEV: That—so to speak—that love of work. That's it. He has no love for his work. He won't give you the chance to fully say what you want. He will interrupt you by saying, "Yes, sir, yes, sir. I understand." But he really doesn't understand. Look at a German! He is entirely ———— has no patience. And yet,

with all his faults, I have great respect for him. Where is Natasha ? Don't you know ?

RAKITIN : She was here a few minutes ago.

ISLAEV : What time is it ? It must be time for dinner. I have been on my feet since morning, and so much to do ! I haven't seen the building yet, to-day. Time flies. It's terrible. I simply don't accomplish a thing. (RAKITIN *smiles*.) I see you are laughing at me. But what can I do, my dear fellow ? I am a man that's settled in life. I am a born master, and I cannot do anything else. There was a time when I dreamed about other things, but I was disappointed, my dear fellow. I burned my fingers at it. That's what happened. Where's Bieliaev ?

RAKITIN : Who is Bieliaev ?

ISLAEV : That new teacher of Russian. He is a little uncouth, but he will overcome it. He's quite a nice fellow, and he's far from being foolish. *I asked him to see how the building was getting on—*

[BIELIAEV *enters*.

Oh, here he is ! Well, how are things at the building ? They are not doing a single thing, I dare say.

BIELIAEV : Yes, they are working.

ISLAEV : Have they finished the second shed ?

BIELIAEV : Yes, and they have begun the third.

ISLAEV : How about the beams ? Have you told them ?

BIELIAEV : Yes.

ISLAEV : Well, what did they say ?

BIELIAEV : They said that they never made them any other way.

ISLAEV : Hm ! Is Ermil, the joiner, there ?

BIELIAEV : Yes, he is there.

ISLAEV : Thank you.

[NATALIA PETROVNA *enters*.

Ah, Natasha ! How are you ?

RAKITIN (*to ISLAEV*) : Why do you insist on greeting everyone twenty times, to-day ?

ISLAEV : I told you, I am busy. By the way, have I shown you our new blowing machine ? Come on. It's very interesting. Imagine ! The hurricane is—well, simply a hurricane. We'll have time to look at it before dinner. Do you want to go ?

RAKITIN : All right.

ISLAEV : Natasha, do you want to come with us ?

NATALIA PETROVNA : I don't understand a thing about your blowing machines. Go by yourselves, and see that you don't stay too long.

ISLAEV (*going out with RAKITIN*) : We'll be back presently.

[BIELIAEV *starts to follow them*.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*to BIELIAEV*) : Where are you going, Aleksiei Nikolaich ?

BIELIAEV : I—I——

NATALIA PETROVNA : Well, if you want to go for a walk——

BIELIAEV : No, I have been out in the air all morning.

NATALIA PETROVNA : If that is the case, sit down. Sit down right here. (*Points to a chair.*) We haven't had a chance for a good talk, yet, Aleksiei Nikolaich. We really haven't got acquainted yet. (*BIELIAEV sits down.*) And I do want to get acquainted with you.

BIELIAEV : I—I feel very flattered.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*smiling*): You are afraid of me, now. I can see that. But wait; after a little while, when you know me better, you will stop being afraid of me. Tell me—tell me, how old are you?

BIELIAEV: Twenty-one years old.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Are your parents alive?

BIELIAEV: Mother is dead, but father is alive.

NATALIA PETROVNA: How long ago did your mother die?

BIELIAEV: Quite a while.

NATALIA PETROVNA: But you remember her, don't you?

BIELIAEV: Surely, I remember her.

NATALIA PETROVNA: And your father is living in Moscow?

BIELIAEV: No, in the country.

NATALIA PETROVNA: And have you any brothers and sisters?

BIELIAEV: One sister.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Do you love her very much?

BIELIAEV: Yes, I love her very much. She's much younger than I am.

NATALIA PETROVNA: And what is her name?

BIELIAEV: Natalia.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*animatedly*): Natalia! That's odd. And my name is Natalia. (*Pauses a moment.*) And do you love her very much?

BIELIAEV: Yes.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Tell me, how do you find my boy?

BIELIAEV: A very sympathetic little fellow.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Isn't he? And so affectionate! He is already attached to you.

BIELIAEV: I am willing to do all I can for him. I am very glad——

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well, you see, Aleksiei Nikolaich, my desire is to make a useful man out of him. I do not know whether I'll succeed. At any rate, I want him to remember for ever his childhood days. Let him have all the freedom possible. That's the main thing. I was brought up quite differently, Aleksiei Nikolaich. My father wasn't a bad man, but he had a very nervous disposition, and he was quite stern—everyone in the house, beginning with mother, was afraid of him. My brother and I used to cross ourselves, secretly, when he called us. Sometimes my father would pet me, but even in his caresses, I remember, I felt more dead than alive. My brother grew up, and—perhaps you have heard about it—he left his father. I shall never forget that terrible day. Until the very end of my father's life I remained the submissive daughter. He used to call me his consolation, his Antigone. (He was blind the last years of his life.) But his most tender caresses did not take away the first impressions received in my youth. I was afraid of him—a blind man—and never felt free in his presence. The effects of this timidity, of this long suppression most likely, haven't disappeared completely even now. I know, that, at first, I would seem—how shall I say it?—cold, or—but I notice that I am talking about myself all this time, instead of telling you something about the boy. All I want to tell you is, that from my personal experience, I know it would be best for the boy to grow up in freedom. You, I think, were not suppressed in your childhood. Am I right?

BIELIAEV: What shall I tell you? No one oppressed me; no one cared about me.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*timidly*): And your father didn't—

BIELIAEV: He had other things to attend to. He used to visit the neighbours a great deal, on business matters. And even if not on business—he used to obtain his livelihood through them, by rendering service to them.

NATALIA PETROVNA: And so, no one attended to your bringing up?

BIELIAEV: To tell the truth, no one. And it must be noticeable. I feel my shortcomings very much.

NATALIA PETROVNA: It's possible—but—
(*Stops, and then continues with some agitation*) By the way, Aleksiei Nikolaevich, was it you who sang in the garden, last night?

BIELIAEV: What time?

NATALIA PETROVNA: In the evening, near the pond.

BIELIAEV: I did. (*Quickly*) I didn't think—the pond is so far away from here. I didn't think that it would be heard here.

NATALIA PETROVNA: You seem to be apologising for it. There is no need of that. You have a very agreeable and resonant voice. You sing quite well. Have you studied music?

BIELIAEV: No, never. I sing by ear—simple songs.

NATALIA PETROVNA: You sing them well. I'll ask you sometime—not now—but when we are a little better acquainted, when we feel a little closer to one another. Don't you think, Aleksiei Nikolaich, that we can get a little closer to one another? I have confidence in you. My chat will prove that to you.

[*She stretches her hand to him, that he may warmly press it. BIELIAEV takes it hesitatingly, not knowing, at first, what to do with it. Then he kisses it.*]

NATALIA PETROVNA *blushes and takes it away. At this moment SHPIGELSKI comes in from the sitting-room. He stops short, then retreats a pace. NATALIA PETROVNA gets up quickly, also BIELIAEV.*

(*with some agitation*) Oh, is that you, doctor? I am here with Aleksiei Nikolaich. (*She stops.*)

SHPIGELSKI (*loudly and unrestrainedly*): Just imagine, Natalia Petrovna, what's going on here! I went into the servant's house and asked for the sick coachman, and behold! My patient was sitting at the table, and eating as heartily as a man can. What do you think of following the medical profession in an instance like this? What do you think of the plight of the doctor who is depending on the sick for his income?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*smiling involuntarily*): Is that the way you found him? (*BIELIAEV starts to go.*) Aleksiei Nikolaich! I forgot to tell you—— (*VIERA runs in from the sitting-room.*)

VIERA: Aleksiei Nikolaich! Aleksiei Nikolaich! (*She stops suddenly at seeing NATALIA PETROVNA.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with some surprise*): What's the matter? What do you want of him?

VIERA (*blushing and drooping her eyes; points to BIELIAEV*): He is wanted.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Who is wanted?

VIERA: Kolia—— That is—Kolia asked me about the kite.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Ah! (*Semi-audibly to VIERA*) On n'entre pas comme cela dans une chambre . . . Cela ne convient pas. (*Turning to SHPIGELSKI*) What time is it, doctor? You always have the exact time. Is it time for dinner?

SHPIGELSKI: Well, let me see. (*Takes his watch out of his pocket.*) It is now twenty minutes past four.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well, it is time to eat. (*She goes up to the looking-glass and fixes her hair, during*

which time VIERA murmurs something to BIELIAEV. Both laugh. NATALIA PETROVNA sees it in the looking glass. SHPIGELSKI looks at her sideways.)

BIELIAEV (*laughing softly*): Is that possible?

VIERA (*nodding with her head; semi-audibly*): Yes, yes. She fell down.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*assuming indifference, as she turns to VIERA*): What happened? Who fell down?

VIERA (*somewhat confused*): No. Aleksiei Nikolaich built some swings, and the nurse took it into her head . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA (*not waiting for her to finish, to SHPIGELSKI*): Oh, by the way, Shpigelski, come here. (*Takes him away to one side and turns to VIERA.*) She didn't hurt herself?

VIERA: Oh, no.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes . . . still, Aleksiei Nikolaich, I think that it is wrong . . .

[MATVIEI comes in from the sitting-room and announces

MATVIEI: Dinner is ready.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Oh, where is Arkadi Sergieich? He and Mikhail Aleksandrovich will be late again as usual.

MATVIEI: They are already in the dining-room.

NATALIA PETROVNA: And mother?

MATVIEI: She is in the dining-room, too.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well, then, let's go. (*Pointing to BIELIAEV*) Viera! Allez en avant avec Monsieur.

[MATVIEI goes out. VIERA and BIELIAEV follow him.

SHPIGELSKI (*to NATALIA PETROVNA*): You wanted to tell me something, didn't you?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Oh, yes. That's it. . . .

You see. . . . We'll talk over your proposition later.

SHPIGELSKI: You mean about Viera Aleksandrovna?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes. I'll think it over. I'll think it over.

[Both go into the sitting-room.]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: *The garden. On the right and left, under the trees, are benches. In the rear, raspberry bushes. KATIA and MATVIEI enter from the right. KATIA carries a basket.*

MATVIEI: How do we stand, Katerina Vasilevna? Let us understand one another, I beg you.

KATIA: Matviei Egorych! Truly, I . . .

MATVIEI: You, Katerina Vasilevna, know very well how I feel towards you. To be sure, I am quite a little older than you are. We can't argue about that. However, I can hold my own. I am right in the prime of life. I am, as you know, of very good morals. What more do you want?

KATIA: Matviei Egorych! Believe me, I appreciate it and am very thankful to you, Matviei Egorych. But, I think we must wait a little while.

MATVIEI: Why wait, Katerina Vasilevna? Before, let me remind you, you didn't use to say that, and as for respecting you, I am quite sure that I can vouch for myself that I do. You will be so respected, Katerina Vasilevna, that you won't ask for anything better. And, in addition to this, I am a man who doesn't drink, and I have never had a bad word from my masters.

KATIA: Truly, Matviei Egorych, I do not know what to tell you.

MATVIEI: Oh, Katerina Vasilevna, it is just lately that you have commenced like this. . . .

KATIA (*blushing*): What do you mean, lately? Why lately?

MATVIEI: Oh, I don't know. . . . Only before—before, you acted differently towards me.

KATIA (*looking into the bushes*): Look out. That German is coming.

MATVIEI (*angrily*): To the devil with him ! That long-beaked crane ! We'll talk it over some other time. (*Goes out to the right.*)

[KATIA starts to go to the raspberry bushes. SCHAAF enters from the left, carrying a fishing rod over his shoulder.

SCHAAF (*to KATIA*): Ver ? Ver, Katerin ?

KATIA (*stopping*): I was told to get some raspberries, Adam Ivanych.

SCHAAF: Raspber ? Raspber ? Raspber iss a gut fruit. You like raspber ?

KATIA: Yes, I like raspberries.

SCHAAF: He, he, he ! Und I . . . Und I, also. I lof everytings dat you lof. (*Seeing that she wants to go away*) Oh, Katerin, vait a lectle vwhile.

KATIA: I have no time. The housekeeper will be mad.

SCHAAF: Eh ! Dot is notings. Here I komm . . . (*Pointing to his rod.*) Fisch—you understand—to take fisch. You lof to take fisch ?

KATIA: Ycs.

SCHAAF: He, he, he ! I lof, too. You know, Katerin, vhat I tell you ? In Cherman, iss a song. (*He sings.*) Katerinchen, Katerinchen, wie liebt' Ich dich so sehr ! . . . Dat means in Russian, Oh, Katrinushka, Katrinushka, how gut I lof you ! (*Wants to embrace her with one arm.*)

KATIA: Stop, stop ! Shame on you ! People are coming. (*Runs into the raspberry bushes.*)

SCHAAF (*assuming a serious look*): Das ist dumm . . .

[NATALIA PETROVNA, arm and arm with RAKITIN, enters from the right.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*to SCHAAF*): Oh, Adam Ivanych ! Are you going fishing ?

SCHAAF: Yes, Madam.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Where is Kolia?

SCHAAF: Mit Lisafet Bogdanov. Lesson on fortepiano.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*looking around*): Are you here alone?

SCHAAF: Allein.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Have you seen Aleksiei Nikolaich?

SCHAAF: No, nohow.

NATALIA PETROVNA: We will go along with you, Adam Ivanych. We'll see how you fish.

SCHAAF: It makes me pleasure.

RAKITIN (*semi-audibly to NATALIA PETROVNA*): What pleasure?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*to RAKITIN*): Come on, come on. Bien tenebreux . . . (*All three go out.*)

KATIA (*carefully putting her head out from the raspberry bushes*): They have gone. (*She comes out; stops a moment and meditates.*) What a funny German! (*Sighs, and starts picking berries again, humming.*)

“Not a fire burns, nor does resin burn,
But a loving heart boils and burns . . .”

Matviei Egorych was right. (*Continues humming*)

“A loving heart boils and burns,
Not after father nor after mother, dear . . .”

What a large raspberry! (*Continues humming*)

“Not after father nor after mother, dear . . .”

How hot it is! Almost stifling. (*Continues humming*)

“Not after father nor after mother, dear,
But it boils and burns after . . .”

[Suddenly looks around. Stops singing, and partly hides herself in the bushes.

BIELIAEV and VIERA enter from the left.
BIELIAEV has a book in his hand.

BIELIAEV (*passing the raspberry bushes. To KATIA*):
Why did you stop, Katia? (*He sings*)

"It boils and burns after a handsome lassie . . ."

KATIA (*blushing*): We don't sing it that way.

BIELIAEV: Well, how do you sing it?

[KATIA laughs, but doesn't answer.

What are you doing? Picking raspberries?
Let's taste them.

KATIA (*giving him the basket*): Take them all.

BIELIAEV: Why all? Viera Aleksandrovna, do you want some? (*Both take some.*) Well, that's enough. (*Starts to return the basket to KATIA.*)

KATIA (*pushing his hand away*): Take them all; take them.

BIELIAEV: No, thank you, Katia. (*Gives her the basket.*) Thank you. (*To VIERA*) Viera Aleksandrovna! Let's sit down on one of these benches. (*Pointing to the kite*) I must put a tail on this. Help me. (*Both go and sit down. BIELIAEV gives her the kite.*) So! Look! Keep it straight! (*Starts to fix the tail.*) Well?

VIERA: I can't see you, if I stand this way.

BIELIAEV: What do you want to see me for?

VIERA: I mean—I want to see how you put the tail on.

BIELIAEV: Wait a minute. (*He fixes the kite so that she can see him.*) Katia! Why don't you sing? Sing!

[After a few moments, KATIA starts humming again.

VIERA: Tell me, Aleksiei Nikolaich, did you fly kites when you were in Moscow?

BIELIAEV: We can't think about kites in Moscow. Hold the string. So? Do you think we have nothing to do in Moscow but to fly kites?

VIERA: What do you do in Moscow?

BIELIAEV: What do we do? We study, and listen to lectures by our professors.

VIERA: What do they teach you?

BIELIAEV: Everything.

VIERA: You must study very hard, harder than anybody.

BIELIAEV: No, not very hard. Not harder than anybody. I am lazy.

VIERA: Why are you lazy?

BIELIAEV: The Lord knows. I must have been born that way.

VIERA (*after a moment's silence*): Have you many friends in Moscow?

BIELIAEV: Yes. Oh, this string isn't strong enough!

VIERA: Do you like them?

BIELIAEV: Surely, I do. Don't you like your friends?

VIERA: My friends? I have no friends.

BIELIAEV: I mean, your girl friends.

VIERA (*slowly*): Y-e-s.

BIELIAEV: Surely you have girl friends?

VIERA: Yes, only, I don't know why, but lately I give them very little thought. I haven't even answered Liza Moshnin's letter, and how she has asked me to do so!

BIELIAEV: Why do you say that you have no friends? Am I not a friend of yours?

VIERA (*smiling*): Well, you—that's different.
(*After a moment's silence*) Aleksiei Nikolaich !

BIELIAEV: Well ?

VIERA: Do you write poetry ?

BIELIAEV: No. Why ?

VIERA: Oh, just because. (*After a pause*) At my boarding-school, a girl used to write poetry.

BIELIAEV (*tightening a knot with his teeth*): Is that so ? Was it good poetry ?

VIERA: I don't know. She used to read it to us, and we cried over it.

BIELIAEV: Why did you cry over it ?

VIERA: Just out of pity. We were very sorry for her.

BIELIAEV: Did you go to the school in Moscow ?

VIERA: Yes, in Moscow, at Madame Bolus'. Natalia Petrovna took me away from there last year.

BIELIAEV: Do you like Natalia Petrovna ?

VIERA: Yes, I like her. She is very kind. I like her very much.

BIELIAEV (*smiling*): And are you afraid of her ?

VIERA (*smiling too*): A little.

BIELIAEV (*after a pause*): Who sent you to school ?

VIERA: Natalia Petrovna's deceased mother. I grew up in her house, for I am an orphan.

BIELIAEV (*letting down his hands*): You an orphan ? And you don't remember your father or your mother ?

VIERA: No, I don't.

BIELIAEV: My mother is dead too. We are both orphans. Well, what can we do ? We needn't despair over it.

VIERA: It is said that orphans quickly cultivate friendships with each other.

BIELIAEV (*looking into her eyes*): Really? And do you think so?

VIERA (*looking into his eyes and smiling*): I think they do just as it is said.

BIELIAEV (*laughing and taking up the kite again*): I should like to know. How long have I been here?

VIERA: This is the twenty-eighth day.

BIELIAEV: What a grand memory you have! Well, the kite is done. Now, we ought to see how the tail will work. We must bring Kolia here.

KATIA (*coming up to them with the basket*): Do you want some more raspberries?

BIELIAEV: No, thank you, Katia.

[KATIA goes away silently.]

VIERA: Kolia is with Lizaveta Bogdanovna.

BIELIAEV: What an idea, to keep the boy indoors on such a fine day!

VIERA: Lizaveta Bogdanovna would only have been in our way.

BIELIAEV: I am not talking about her.

VIERA (*quickly*): Kolia couldn't have been with us, without her. Anyway, she praised you a lot, last night.

BIELIAEV: Really?

VIERA: Don't you like her?

BIELIAEV: Not a bit. Let her snuff her tobacco, and that's all. Why are you sighing?

VIERA (*after a pause*): Oh, just because. How clear the sky is!

BIELIAEV: Is that why you are sighing?

[A short silence.]

Perhaps you are lonesome ?

VIERA : I, lonesome ? No. I never know why I am sighing. . . . I'm never lonesome. On the contrary. . . . (*Short pause.*) I don't know, but I think that I am not altogether well. Yesterday I went upstairs after a book, and without any cause I sat down on the stairs and began to cry. The Lord knows why. And for a long time afterwards, tears rolled down. What did it all mean ? Still, I feel all right.

BIELIAEV : That's your age. You are growing up. It always happens. . . . That's why your eyes were a little swollen, yesterday ?

VIERA : And you noticed it ?

BIELIAEV : Surely.

VIERA : You notice everything !

BIELIAEV : Oh, no, not everything.

VIERA (*pensively*) : Aleksiei Nikolaich !

BIELIAEV : Well ?

VIERA (*after a moment's silence*) : What did I want to ask you ? I have forgotten, really, what I wanted to ask you.

BIELIAEV : Why are you so upset ?

VIERA : No . . . no. Oh, yes. This is what I wanted to ask you. I think you told me that you have a sister.

BIELIAEV : I have.

VIERA : Tell me—do I look anything like her ?

BIELIAEV : Oh, no. You are much better looking.

VIERA : Is that possible ? Your sister . . . I should like to be in her place.

BIELIAEV : How is that ? You mean to say you'd like to live in our hut ?

VIERA: No, I didn't mean to say that. . . . Have you only a little house?

BIELIAEV: A very small house. It isn't anything like this one.

VIERA: And why do you want a large house, with many rooms?

BIELIAEV: Why do I want it? Well, in time you'll find out why a large house is necessary.

VIERA: In time. . . . When will that be?

BIELIAEV: When you will be housekeeping. . . .

VIERA (*thoughtfully*): You think so?

BIELIAEV: Well, you'll see. (*After a moment's silence*) Well, shall we go after Kolia, Viera Aleksandrovna?

VIERA: Why don't you call me Viera?

BIELIAEV: And will you call me Aleksici?

VIERA: Why not? (*Suddenly shudders.*) Oh!

BIELIAEV: What's the matter?

VIERA (*semi-audibly*): Natalia Petrovna is coming here.

BIELIAEV (*semi-audibly*): Where?

VIERA (*nodding with her head*): There, over the path, with Mikhail Aleksandrovich.

BIELIAEV (*getting up*): Come on, let's get Kolia. He must have finished his lesson by this time.

VIERA: Come on. Otherwise, I am afraid she will call me down.

[*Both get up and quickly go out to the left. KATIA again hides in the raspberry bushes. NATALIA PETROVNA and RAKITIN enter from the right.*]

NATALIA PETROVNA (*stopping*): It seems to me that there are Mr. Bieliev and Viera going away.

RAKITIN: Yes, that's they.

NATALIA PETROVNA: It seems as if they were running away from us.

RAKITIN: It is possible.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*after a moment's silence*): I do not really think that it is proper for Viera to be in the garden alone with a young man. To be sure, she is a child yet; nevertheless, it isn't proper. I will speak to her about it.

RAKITIN: How old is she?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Seventeen. She is seventeen years old. . . . How hot it is to-day! I am tired. Let's sit down.

[Both sit down on the bench, on which VIERA and BIELIAEV have been sitting.]

Has Shpigelski gone?

RAKITIN: He has gone.

NATALIA PETROVNA: You should have kept him. I can't understand why that man became a doctor. He is so funny. He makes me laugh.

RAKITIN: And I imagined that you were not in a mood for laughing to-day.

NATALIA PETROVNA: What made you think so?

RAKITIN: Nothing special.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Because sentimental things don't please me? Oh, yes. I warn you that absolutely nothing will move me to-day. But that doesn't keep me from laughing. Moreover, I had to talk over something with Shpigelski.

RAKITIN: May I know what?

NATALIA PETROVNA: No, you may not. You know enough without that, about what I am thinking and what I am doing. It's too monotonous.

RAKITIN: Pardon me . . . I didn't suppose . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA: I want to keep something from you.

RAKITIN: As you please. But, from what you have said, one could conclude that I know everything——

NATALIA PETROVNA (*interrupting him*): As though you don't !

RAKITIN: Well, if you like to joke about me——

NATALIA PETROVNA: Then you really don't know all that I am leading up to ? If that's the case, I withhold my congratulations. However, I do not believe it. You are watching me from morning until night——

RAKITIN: Is that a reproach ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: A reproach ? (*After a moment's silence*) No. I simply see now that you are not very penetrating.

RAKITIN: Very likely. But as I am watching from morning until night, then permit me to say one thing to you.

NATALIA PETROVNA: On my account ? Go ahead.

RAKITIN: You won't be angry with me ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Oh, no. If I wanted to, I couldn't.

RAKITIN: For some time, Natalia Petrovna, you have been in a nervous state, and that condition is involuntarily brought on from within. It seems that you are struggling with your own self; that you don't quite know yourself. Before I went to visit the Krinitseys I never noticed it. It has only been troubling you recently. (*NATALIA PETROVNA draws with the point of her parasol on the ground.*) Sometimes you sigh deeply, like a tired, a very tired man, who never has the opportunity of taking a rest.

NATALIA PETROVNA: What are you concluding from this, Mr. Observer?

RAKITIN: I? Nothing. Only it worries me.

NATALIA PETROVNA: I am very much obliged to you for your interest in me.

RAKITIN: Moreover——

NATALIA PETROVNA (*impatiently*): Please, change the subject. (*Silence.*)

RAKITIN: Didn't you intend to go somewhere to-day?

NATALIA PETROVNA: No.

RAKITIN: Why, it is such a nice day.

NATALIA PETROVNA: I am too lazy. (*Silence.*) Tell me, do you know Bolshintsov?

RAKITIN: Our neighbour, Afanasi Ivanych?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes.

RAKITIN: What a question! It was only two days ago that he and I played Preference here.

NATALIA PETROVNA: What kind of man is he, I'd like to know.

RAKITIN: Bolshintsov?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes, yes, Bolshintsov.

RAKITIN: Well, I must confess that I didn't expect that.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*impatiently*): You didn't expect what?

RAKITIN: That you should ask about Bolshintsov. He is a foolish, fat, heavy man. However, I can't say anything bad about him.

NATALIA PETROVNA: He is neither as foolish nor as fat as you think.

RAKITIN: Perhaps. I own up that I haven't studied the gentleman very attentively.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*ironically*): You haven't studied him attentively!

RAKITIN (*with a forced smile*): And what made you think—

NATALIA PETROVNA: Nothing special. Just because. (*Short pause.*)

RAKITIN: Look, Natalia Petrovna! How beautiful this dark green oak looks against the dark blue sky. The sun's rays just pour over it. And what beautiful colours! How much indestructible life and power there is in it! Particularly, if you compare it with this young birch. The white tree seems ready to disappear in the light. Its small leaves shine with a kind of faint lustre, as though they were melting away. And yet, it looks so beautiful. . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA: Do you know, Rakitin—I noticed it long ago—your feelings for the beauties of Nature are very fine and very clear, and you're talking about them very intelligently. In fact, so clearly and so intelligently, that I imagine that Nature ought to be greatly indebted to you for your particularly well-chosen phrases concerning her. You pursue her as a foppish marquis pursues a pretty peasant girl. Only, I think that she wouldn't understand or appreciate your fine remarks any more than the peasant girl would understand the court frivolities of the marquis. Nature is more simple, more uncouth than you imagine, because she is, thank the Lord, quite healthy. Birch-trees do not melt, nor do they faint like nervous ladies.

RAKITIN: Quelle tirade! Nature is healthy! That means, in other words, that I'm a sickly being.

NATALIA PETROVNA: You are not alone; we are both sickly beings.

RAKITIN: I know the art of telling another, in a most courteous way, the most unpleasant things. Instead of telling him, for instance, right to his face, "You, my dear fellow, are a fool," it is only necessary to say to him, with a pleasant smile, "You and I, my dear fellow, are both fools."

NATALIA PETROVNA: You feel insulted? Nonsense! All I wanted to say was that you and I are not too strong. You don't like the fact, that we are both old, very old.

RAKITIN: Why old? I don't consider myself old.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well, listen to me. Here we are sitting, you and I. . . . Very likely, upon this very bench, fifteen minutes ago, sat two really young beings.

RAKITIN: You mean Bieliaev and Viera? To be sure, they are younger than we are. There are a few years' difference between us, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we are very old.

NATALIA PETROVNA: The difference between us is not only in the years.

RAKITIN: Oh, yes. I understand. You are jealous of their naïveté, their youth, their innocence. In short, their foolishness.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Do you think so? And, do you think that they are foolish? I notice that everybody seems foolish to you, to-day. No, you don't understand me. What of it, if they are foolish? What use is there in being sensible, when it affords no pleasure? There is nothing more tiresome than a bright man with a languid disposition.

RAKITIN: Hm! Why don't you speak out plainly, without reserve? You want to say that I am not interesting. Then why don't you say so? Why do you attack brightness in general, when you mean me in particular?

NATALIA PETROVNA: You haven't hit upon the right point.

[KATIA comes out from the raspberry bushes.

What are you doing, Katia—picking raspberries?

KATIA: Yes, ma'am.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Let's see. (KATIA goes up to her.) Fine raspberries! How red! But your cheeks are still redder. (KATIA smiles and drops her eyes.) Well, go! (KATIA goes away.)

RAKITIN: There is another young creature, to your taste.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Positively so. (Gets up.)

RAKITIN: Where are you going?

NATALIA PETROVNA: First of all, I want to see what Viera is doing. . . . It's time for her to come home. . . . Secondly, I confess, I don't like our conversation. It is better to cut out our talk about Nature and Youth for a while.

RAKITIN: Perhaps you'd like to go alone?

NATALIA PETROVNA: To be frank, yes. We'll see each other soon. However, we part friends, don't we? (Stretches her hand to him.)

RAKITIN (getting up): Of course. (Presses her hand.)

NATALIA PETROVNA: Good-bye. (She opens her parasol and goes out to the left.)

RAKITIN (pacing a little, back and forth): What's the matter with her? (Pause.) Is she capricious? I've never noticed that in her before. On the contrary, I've never known a woman who was more even in her disposition. What's the cause? (Paces again and then stops short.) Oh, how funny people are, who have only one thought, one purpose, and one occupation in life, such as I, for instance. She spoke the truth when she said that I was observing all nonsensical things from

morning until night. That makes one petty. That's true. But I can't live without her. In her company, I am more than happy. This particular feeling cannot be attributed to luck. I belong to her absolutely. To part with her would be, without any exaggeration, like parting with life. What's the matter with her? What does this inner struggle mean? This involuntary, cutting speech? Am I not beginning to disgust her? Hm! (*Sits down.*) I have never fooled myself. I know very well how much she loves me, but I hope that this calm feeling will, in time . . . I hope! Do I really have a right, do I really dare to hope? I confess, my position is quite peculiar . . . almost despicable. (*Short pause.*) Well, what's the use of talking like this? She's a respectable married woman. I am not a Lovelace. (*With a bitter smile.*) To my sorrow! . . . (*Gets up quickly.*) Well, enough! Away with all this nonsense! (*Pacing a little.*) What a beautiful day! (*A moment's silence.*) How aptly she criticised me! My "well-chosen" expressions! She is very bright, particularly when she is in certain moods. And what a sudden reverence for simplicity and innocence. . . . That Russian teacher. . . . She speaks of him quite often. I must confess, I don't see anything in him. He is simply a student; like all students. Is she . . .? Impossible! She is in no such mood. She doesn't know herself what she wants, and so she goes for me. Children do abuse their nurses. . . . What a flattering comparison! But, I mustn't interfere with her. When these fits of troubled unrest have passed by, she will be the first one to laugh over this lanky bird, over this youthful freshness. . . . Your explanation isn't bad, Mikhail Aleksandrych, my dear friend. But, is it true? The Lord knows. Well, we'll see. It has happened more than once, my dear friend, that after a long struggle with yourself, you have had to drop all your propositions and imaginations,

fold your hands and calmly await the outcome. Meanwhile, you must confess, my friend, that you feel quite awkward and grieved. Such is your way. (*Looks around.*) Ah ! Here he is, himself, your superior youth ! He has come at an opportune time. I have not yet had a good talk with him. Now I have a chance to see what kind of man he is.

[BIELIAEV *enters from the left.*

Ah, Aleksiei Nikolaich ! And so you have come out for a little walk in the fresh air ?

BIELIAEV : Yes.

RAKITIN : But, to tell the truth, the air isn't very fresh to-day. It is awfully hot. But here, under these lime-trees, in the shade, it is quite bearable. (*A moment's silence.*) Have you seen Natalia Petrovna ?

BIELIAEV : I met her just now. She went into the house with Viera Aleksandrovna.

RAKITIN : Wasn't it you with Viera Aleksandrovna that I saw here about half an hour ago ?

BIELIAEV : Yes. I took a walk with her.

RAKITIN : Ah ! (*Takes him by the arm.*) Well, how do you like life in the country ?

BIELIAEV : I love the country. There is only one thing lacking here—a place to hunt.

RAKITIN : You like hunting ?

BIELIAEV : Yes. Do you ?

RAKITIN : I ? No, I confess, I am a very poor shot. I am too lazy for it.

BIELIAEV : I am lazy, myself, except when it comes to walking.

RAKITIN : Uhu ! Are you too lazy to read ?

BIELIAEV : No, I love to read. I am too lazy to work long. I am particularly lazy when it comes to working on one and the same thing for a long time.

RAKITIN (*smiling*): Are you lazy, for instance, when you have to converse with the ladies for a long time?

BIELIAEV: Oh, you are making fun of me! I am afraid of the ladies.

RAKITIN (*agitatedly*): What makes you think that I am laughing at you?

BIELIAEV: Oh, just because. There is no harm in it. (*Pause.*) Tell me, where can I get some powder around here?

RAKITIN: In the city, I think. It is sold there under the name of poppy. Do you want the best quality?

BIELIAEV: No, any kind will do. I don't want to shoot with it. I want to make fire-crackers.

RAKITIN: Oh, you know how to do that?

BIELIAEV: I do. I have picked out a place for it, behind the pond. I have heard, that in a week from now, Natalia Petrovna will have a birthday. So that will come in handy.

RAKITIN: Natalia Petrovna will appreciate such attention on your part. She likes you, Aleksiei Nikolaich, I can tell you that.

BIELIAEV: That's very flattering. By the way, Mikhail Aleksandrych, you take some journals, do you not? Will you let me read them?

RAKITIN: Why yes, with pleasure. There are some very good poems in them.

BIELIAEV: I am not an admirer of poetry.

RAKITIN: Why?

BIELIAEV: No reason. Funny poetry always seems to me to be awfully forced. And then, there isn't much of it. And sentimental poetry—well, I don't know . . . I don't believe in it, for some reason.

RAKITIN: You prefer stories?

BIELIAEV: Yes, I love good stories. But critical essays please me most.

RAKITIN: Why?

BIELIAEV: Because they are written by sincere men.

RAKITIN: Do you do anything in the line of literature?

BIELIAEV: Oh, no. What's the use of writing, when the Lord didn't see fit to give me the talent for it? Only to make people laugh? But this is what is surprising to me, and I would like to have you explain it to me, if you please: how is it that, ordinarily, otherwise very bright men, when they take to writing, make such a very bad job of it? No, I can't write. I pray the Lord that I may understand what has been written.

RAKITIN: Let me tell you, Aleksiei Nikolaich, that not many young men have as much common sense as you have.

BIELIAEV: I thank you very much for the compliment. (*Pause.*) I picked out the place for the fireworks, on the opposite side of the pond, because I know how to make Roman candles that will burn upon the water.

RAKITIN: That must be very beautiful. Pardon me, Aleksiei Nikolaich, but do you know French?

BIELIAEV: No. I translated Paul de Cock's novel, *The Milkmaid of Montfermeil*. Perhaps you have heard about it? I got fifty rubles for it, but I don't know a word of French. Just imagine! "Quatre-vingt-dix," I translated "four-twenty-ten"! Necessity, you know, forced me to do it. I am sorry. I should like to know French, but it's that cursed laziness. . . . I should like to read George Sand in French. The pronunciation—I can't do that. An, on, en, in—it's awful.

RAKITIN: Well, that isn't so bad; that can be helped.

BIELIAEV: What time is it?

RAKITIN (*looking at his watch*): Half past one.

BIELIAEV: Why does Elizaveta Bogdanovna keep Kolia so long at his lesson? I am sure he is dying to come out here.

RAKITIN (*kindly*): One must learn, Aleksiei Nikolaich.

BIELIAEV (*with a sigh*): You ought not to say that, Mikhail Aleksandrych, and I ought not to hear it. Surely, we can't all be such bores as I am.

RAKITIN: Oh, don't say that.

BIELIAEV: I know that it is so.

RAKITIN: But I also know, and know for sure, that you are underestimating yourself. That is just your way, and that is just what is admired.

BIELIAEV: By whom, for instance?

RAKITIN: By Natalia Petrovna, for one.

BIELIAEV: Natalia Petrovna! In her presence, I don't feel myself free at all, as you say.

RAKITIN: Oh, really?

BIELIAEV: Then, anyway, Mikhail Aleksandrych, isn't the bringing-up the first thing that shows a man? It is easy for you to say. . . . Really, I don't understand you . . . (*Suddenly stopping.*) What's that? A rail bird chirping in the garden? (*Starts to go.*)

RAKITIN: Perhaps. But where are you going?

BIELIAEV: To get my gun. (*Goes out to the left. He meets NATALIA PETROVNA.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA (*seeing him, smiles*): Where are you going, Aleksiei Nikolaich?

BIELIAEV: I?

RAKITIN: To get his gun. He heard a rail bird in the garden.

NATALIA PETROVNA: No, don't shoot in the garden, please. Let the poor bird live. And then you might scare Grandmother.

BIELIAEV: Yes, ma'am.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*laughing*): Oh, Aleksei Nikolaich, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! "Yes, ma'am!" What kind of an expression is that? How can you talk like that? Have a little patience, and Mikhail Aleksandrych and myself will attend to your manners. Yes, yes. He and I have spoken about it more than once. There is a plot against you. I give you warning now. You will permit me to correct some of your shortcomings?

BIELIAEV: If you please, I——

NATALIA PETROVNA: First of all, don't be so shy. It isn't becoming to you. Yes, we'll attend to you. (*Pointing to RAKITIN*) It is true, that he and I are old people, and you are a young man. Isn't it true? Just see how nicely it will all go. You will attend to Kolia, and I—we will attend to you.

BIELIAEV: I shall be very much obliged to you.

NATALIA PETROVNA: That's good. What were you talking about with Mikhail Aleksandrovich?

RAKITIN (*smiling*): He told me how he managed to translate a French book, without knowing a word of French.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well, we'll have a good chance to teach you French. By the way, what have you done with your kite?

BIELIAEV: I took it home. I thought that you didn't like it.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with some restraint*): What made you think so? Because I—because I took

Viera home? No, you made a mistake. (*Quickly*) However, I think Kolia has finished his lesson. Come on, we'll take him, Viera, and the kite. Do you want to? And we'll all go up to the meadow.

BIELIAEV: With pleasure, Natalia Petrovna.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Very well. Come on, come on. (*Stretches out her hand.*) Take my hand. How clumsy you are! Come on. Hurry! (*Both go out quickly to the left.*)

RAKITIN (*looking after them*): How swift, how lively! I have never seen such an expression on her face. And what a sudden change! (*Pause.*) Souvent femme varie. But I—— She certainly doesn't like me, to-day. That's clear. (*Pause.*) Well, we'll see what time will bring forth. (*Slowly*) Is it possible, that . . . (*Motions with his hand.*) . . . It's impossible. But this smile, this soft bright look. . . . Oh, Lord! I hope that I'll never experience the tortures of jealousy, particularly of senseless jealousy. (*Suddenly looking up.*) Bah, bah, bah, what fate brought you here?

[SHPIGELSKI and BOLSHINTSOV enter from the left.

(*Going to meet them*) How do you do, how do you do, gentlemen? I confess, Shpigelski, I didn't expect you here to-day. (*Shakes hands with him.*)

SHPIGELSKI: I didn't expect to be here myself. Well, I stopped at his house (*pointing to BOLSHINTSOV*) and he was in his carriage, ready to come down here. So I turned around, and here I am.

RAKITIN: Well, what's the good word?

BOLSHINTSOV: I was getting ready——

SHPIGELSKI (*interrupting him*): They told us that the folks were in the garden. At any rate, there was no one in the reception-room.

RAKITIN: Didn't you meet Natalia Petrovna?

SHPIGELSKI: When?

RAKITIN: Just now.

SHPIGELSKI: No. We didn't come directly from the house here. Afanasi Ivanych wanted to see if there were any mushrooms in the woods.

BOLSHINTSOV (*not comprehending*): I—

SHPIGELSKI: Well, we know that you are very fond of lying in the shade of the birch-trees. So Natalia Petrovna has gone home? Well, we can turn around too.

BOLSHINTSOV: Surely.

RAKITIN: Yes, she went home to call everyone out for a walk. I think they are getting ready to fly a kite.

SHPIGELSKI: Oh, how nice! In such weather, they ought to be out.

RAKITIN: You may remain here. I'll go and tell her you have come.

SHPIGELSKI: Why should you bother yourself? Please, Mikhail Aleksandrovich. . . .

RAKITIN: No bother. I want something in the house, anyway.

SHPIGELSKI: Oh, if that's the case, we won't keep you away. Don't stand on any ceremony, you know.

RAKITIN: Good-bye, gentlemen. (*Goes out to the left.*)

SHPIGELSKI: Good-bye. (*To BOLSHINTSOV*) Well, Afanasi Ivanych—

BOLSHINTSOV: Why did you, Ignati Ilich, invent a story about mushrooms? I was surprised. I couldn't make out what you wanted with the mushrooms.

SHPIGELSKI: According to you, then, I should have said that you were timid; that you didn't want to come along.

BOLSHINTSOV: That's so, but why mushrooms? I don't know, perhaps I was mistaken——

SHPIGELSKI: You surely were mistaken that time. You'd better think about this; here we are, as you wished. Now you'd better be careful not to put your foot into anything.

BOLSHINTSOV: Yes, Ignati Ilich, you . . . You told me—that is . . . I want to know for sure what answer . . .

SHPIGELSKI: My dear Afanasi Ivanych! It is a little over fifteen versts from your home here, and you have asked me the same question at least three times to a verst. Isn't that enough for you? Now, listen. I am indulging you for the last time. This is what Natalia Petrovna told me: "I——"

BOLSHINTSOV (*shaking his head*): Yes.

SHPIGELSKI (*angrily*): What do you mean by "yes"? I haven't told you anything yet. "I," she said, "know Mr. Bolshintsov very little. But he seems to me to be a good man. On the other hand, I have no intention of forcing Viera. And therefore, let him call on us, and if he deserves it——"

BOLSHINTSOV: Deserves it! Did she say, deserves it?

SHPIGELSKI: "If he deserves her affections, I and Anna Semenovna will have no objections."

BOLSHINTSOV: ". . . will have no objections!" She said it just that way? "Will have no objections?"

SHPIGELSKI: Yes, yes, yes! What a funny man you are! "We will not stand in the way of their happiness."

BOLSHINTSOV: Hm ! Hm !

SHPIGELSKI: "Their happiness." Now, take notice, Afanasi Ivanych, as to what the real problem is now. It is up to you, now, to convince Viera Aleksandrovna herself, that her marriage with you will make her fortune. You must deserve her affections.

BOLSHINTSOV (*blinking*): Yes, yes, to deserve—exactly. I agree with you.

SHPIGELSKI: You insisted upon my bringing you here to-day. Well, I'll see what you are going to do.

BOLSHINTSOV: Do ? Yes, yes, I must do, I must deserve it. That's it. Only, Ignati Ilich, let me confess to you, as to my best friend, a little weakness of mine. I, you said, wanted you to bring me here to-day.

SHPIGELSKI: Not wanted, but insisted. You pestered me to bring you here.

BOLSHINTSOV: Well, yes. All right, let it be that way. I agree with you. But, you see, at home, I thought I was all ready, and now I am overcome with timidity.

SHPIGELSKI: What are you afraid of ?

BOLSHINTSOV (*looking at him from under his eyelashes*): It's quite a risk.

SHPIGELSKI: What ! W-h-a-t !

BOLSHINTSOV: A risk. A big risk. I, Ignati Ilich, must confess to you, as—

SHPIGELSKI (*interrupting him*): "As to my best friend." I know it, I know it. Go on.

BOLSHINTSOV: Yes, I agree with you. I must confess, Ignati Ilich, that I . . . I, generally speaking, have had very little to do with the feminine sex. I, Ignati Ilich, confess to you, frankly, that I simply cannot think of a single

word which I could say to the feminine sex. And then, alone with a young lady !

SHPIGELSKI: You surprise me. I don't know a single thing that you couldn't say to the feminine sex, especially with a young lady, and just between you two.

BOLSHINTSOV: Well, that's all right for you. . . . But, how can I compare with you ? Well, it is concerning this subject that I want your assistance, Ignati Ilich. It is said, that in such matters, the devil is always in the way of the beginning. So, if possible, I wish you would give me a couple of starters. Something that will make a bit of pleasant news, like—for instance—a little remark of some kind. Then, I'll try to do the rest myself. I'll think afterwards. I'll be able to manage it somehow.

SHPIGELSKI: I'm not going to give you any words, Afanasi Ivanych, because words will be of no earthly use to you. But I will give you a piece of advice, if you want me to.

BOLSHINTSOV: Please, sir. And as for my appreciation of—you know.

SHPIGELSKI: Stop, stop ! I am not bargaining with you.

BOLSHINTSOV (*in a lower voice*): You can be sure about the troika I promised you.

SHPIGELSKI: That's all right, that's all right. You see, Afanasi Ivanych, you are, unquestionably, a most excellent man, in every respect (BOLSHINTSOV *bows slightly*); a man with most excellent qualities.

BOLSHINTSOV: Oh, please.

SHPIGELSKI: Moreover, I think you have three hundred serfs.

BOLSHINTSOV: Three hundred and twenty.

SHPIGELSKI: They are not mortgaged ?

BOLSHINTSOV: I am not indebted for a copper to anybody.

SHPIGELSKI: Well, that's good. I have told you, time and again, that you are a most excellent man, and suitor. But, you say yourself, that you have never had anything to do with the ladies.

BOLSHINTSOV (*sighing*): That's right, that's right. I can say, Ignati Ilich, that I have been estranged from the ladies since boyhood.

SHPIGELSKI (*with a sigh*): Well, you see, that isn't really a vice, in a man, but to the contrary. However, in some cases, as, for instance, in the first declaration of love, it is absolutely necessary to be able to say something. Isn't that right?

BOLSHINTSOV: I fully agree with you.

SHPIGELSKI: Otherwise, Viera Aleksandrovna may think that you are sick. Of course, she couldn't think anything else. Moreover, your physique, although in every respect quite presentable, yet isn't anything striking to the eye—striking to the eye. And, nowadays, that is quite essential.

BOLSHINTSOV (*sighing*): It is essential, nowadays.

SHPIGELSKI: Young girls, at least, like it. And your age—well, in a word, you and I couldn't win a girl just by our looks. That means, then, that you needn't think about pleasant words. This would be a bad time for them. But you have a better means, more reliable, and more hopeful—namely, your good qualities, my dear Afanasi Ivanych. And your three hundred and twenty serfs. Were I in your place, I would simply tell Viera Aleksandrovna——

BOLSHINTSOV: When we are alone?

SHPIGELSKI: Positively, when you are alone.
“Viera Aleksandrovna!”

[*By the movements of BOLSHINTSOV's lips, it is evident that he repeats SHPIGELSKI's words, committing them to memory.*

"I love you, and ask you to marry me. I am a kind, simple, and peaceful man, and not poor. You will have lots of freedom with me. I shall try my best to please you. You can inquire about me, and in the meantime, give me a little more of your attention than you have given me up to now. Give me your answer, whatever you like, and whenever you like. I am ready to wait, and shall even consider it a pleasure."

BOLSHINTSOV (*repeating the last word*): "Pleasure." So, so. I fully agree with you. Only, Ignati Ilich, you saw fit to use the word, "peaceful." That is, that I am a peaceful man——

SHPIGELSKI: Well, are you not a peaceful man?

BOLSHINTSOV: Y-c-s. But, however, it seems to me . . . Would it be nice to use that word, Ignati Ilich? Wouldn't it be better to say, for instance——

SHPIGELSKI: For instance?

BOLSHINTSOV: For instance . . . for instance . . . (*Pause.*) Well, perhaps it will be all right to say peaceful.

SHPIGELSKI: Oh! Afanasi Ivanych! Listen to me. The more simply you express yourself and the less flowery language you use in your speech, the better you will get on, believe me. The main thing is, not to insist, not to insist, Afanasi Ivanych. Viera Aleksandrovna is very young yet, and you could frighten her away. . . . Give her time to think over your proposition. One thing more; I almost forgot. You allowed me to give you advice, didn't you? Does it happen to you sometimes, my dear Afanasi Ivanych, that you say *froot*? It is, perhaps, permissible to say

that, but *fruit* is better. It is, so to say, more generally accepted. And again, I remember, once you called a land-owner, "bonzhiban." It is a good word, but I am sorry to say it doesn't mean anything. You know, I am not very good on French dialect, myself, but I know this much, that you will do better not to use such words. Then I'll guarantee you success. (*Looks around.*) Oh, here we are. They are all coming here.

[BOLSHINTSOV *wants to go away.*

Where are you going: after some mushrooms?

[BOLSHINTSOV *smiles, grows red in the face, and remains.*

The main thing is not to be timid.

BOLSHINTSOV (*quickly*): But Viera Aleksandrovna doesn't know anything yet?

SHPIGELSKI: Surely not.

BOLSHINTSOV: Well, I depend upon you. (*He blows his nose.*)

[NATALIA PETROVNA, VIERA, BIELIAEV, *with his kite*, KOLIA, RAKITIN, and LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA *enter from the left*. NATALIA PETROVNA *is in high spirits.*

NATALIA PETROVNA (*to BOLSHINTSOV and SHPIGELSKI*): Oh, how do you do, gentlemen? How do you do, Shpigelski? I didn't expect you, to-day. Still, I am glad to see you. How do you, Afanasi Ivanych?

[BOLSHINTSOV *bows, somewhat confusedly.*

SHPIGELSKI (*to NATALIA PETROVNA; pointing to BOLSHINTSOV*): This gentleman insisted on bringing me here.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*smiling*): I am very much obliged to him. But do you need to be forced to come here?

SHPIGELSKI: No, but I left here only this morning, so——

NATALIA PETROVNA: You are involving yourself, Mr. Diplomat !

SHPIGELSKI: I am very glad, Natalia Petrovna, to see you in what seems to me to be a jolly mood.

NATALIA PETROVNA: And you consider it necessary to remark upon it? Does it happen so seldom with me?

SHPIGELSKI: Oh, no, no.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Monsieur le Diplomat, you are getting more and more involved.

KOLIA (*who has been turning all this time between VIERA and BIELIAEV*): Mamma ! When are we going to fly the kite?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Whenever you like. Aleksici Nikolaich ! And you, Viera ! Come, let's go to the meadow. (*Turning to the other*), You gentlemen, I think will not be interested. Lizaveta Bogdanovna and Rakitin ! I give to your care our kind Afanasi Ivanych.

RAKITIN: Natalia Petrovna ! What makes you think that we won't be interested?

NATALIA PETROVNA: You are intelligent people. It will seem to you like a piece of foolishness. However, as you like. We are not going to keep you back. You can follow us. (*To BIELIAEV and VIERA*) Come on.

[NATALIA PETROVNA, VIERA, BIELIAEV and KOLIA go out to the right.]

SHPIGELSKI (*having looked with some surprise at RAKITIN; to BOLSHINTSOV*): Kind Afanasi Ivanych ! Give your hand to Lizaveta Bogdanovna.

BOLSHINTSOV (*hurriedly*): With great pleasure. (*Takes LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA by the arm.*)

SHPIGELSKI (*to RAKITIN*) : If you will permit me, I will go with you, Mikhail Aleksandrych. (*Takes him by the arm.*) See how they run over the path. Come on, we'll see how they fly their kite, although we are intelligent people. Afanasi Ivanych ! Don't you want to go ahead ?

BOLSHINTSOV (*walking; to LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA*) : We can say that the weather, to-day, is fine, very fine.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*affectedly*) : Oh, very !

SHPIGELSKI (*to RAKITIN*) : Mikhail Aleksandrych ! I want to talk something over with you. (*RAKITIN laughs suddenly.*) What are you laughing about ?

RAKITIN : Nothing. It seems funny to me, that we have fallen into the rear-guard.

SHPIGELSKI : Do you know, that it is very easy for the advance guard to fall into the rear-guard ? It is merely a matter of reversing the direction.

[*All go out to the right.*]

CURTAIN

ACT III

Same scene as in Act One. RAKITIN and SHPIGELSKI enter through the sitting-room door.

SHPIGELSKI: What shall I do? Help me, please, Mikhail Aleksandrych!

RAKITIN: How can I help you, Ignati Ilich?

SHPIGELSKI: What do you mean, how can you help me? You, Mikhail Aleksandrych, ought to examine my circumstances. To tell the truth, I am only an outsider in this matter. I can say that I have merely tried to please. . . . My kindness will be the death of me.

RAKITIN (*laughing*): Oh, you are far from dying yet.

SHPIGELSKI (*also laughing*): No one can tell that. However, I am in a very awkward position. At the request of Natalia Petrovna, I brought Bolshintsov here, and gave him an answer with her permission. Now, one side is mad at me because I have done such a foolish thing; and the other side, Bolshintsov, doesn't give me any peace. They run away from him, and don't talk to me.

RAKITIN: Why did you, Ignati Ilich, want to take up with such things? Bolshintsov, let it be said between ourselves, is a big fool.

SHPIGELSKI: The idea! Between ourselves! That isn't anything new. Since when do sensible people only get married? Though they ought to keep out of everything else, fools needn't keep out of getting married. You say that I took this thing up— Not at all. This is how it happened: a friend asked me to put in a good word for him. Well, should I have refused him? I am a good-natured fellow, and cannot refuse. I carried out a friend's commission, and then was asked not to bother myself about it! I took the hint and was not going to bother about it any

more. Then, they themselves encouraged me, so to say. I submitted, and now they are mad at me, again. What am I to blame for, anyway?

RAKITIN: But who is telling you that you are to blame? Only one thing surprises me. What are you bothering for?

SHPIGELSKI: What for? . . . what for? The man doesn't give me any peace.

RAKITIN: Oh, nonsense!

SHPIGELSKI: And then, he is an old friend of mine.

RAKITIN (*with a smile of distrust*): Yes? That's a horse of another colour.

SHPIGELSKI (*also smiling*): Well, I am not going to keep it from you. It's hard to fool you. Well, he promised me—you know—my horse went lame—and he promised to give me another one.

RAKITIN: An extra horse?

SHPIGELSKI: No. All three new ones.

RAKITIN: Why didn't you say so in the first place?

SHPIGELSKI (*quickly*): But, please, don't think . . . I should never have consented to be a mediator in such a case, for it is positively contrary to my nature—(RAKITIN *smiles*)—if I hadn't known that Bolshintsov was a very honest man. However, I want but one thing now. Let them give me a definite answer, yes, or no.

RAKITIN: Has it gone so far?

SHPIGELSKI: What are you thinking about? I am not talking about marriage, now, but about permission to visit.

RAKITIN: Who can forbid it?

SHPIGELSKI: How you talk—forbid it ! Surely, for anybody else but Bolshintsov, who is a timid, innocent man, it would be different. He depends upon himself very little. He ought to be somewhat encouraged. Then, his intentions are most honourable.

RAKITIN: And the horses are good.

SHPIGELSKI: And the horses are good. (*Snuffs tobacco, and proposes the same to RAKITIN.*) Will you indulge ?

RAKITIN: No, thank you.

SHPIGELSKI: So it is, Mikhail Aleksandrych. I don't want to fool you. Why should I ? The case is as plain as the nose on your face. He is a man of honest habits, and quite well-to-do. He is a peaceful man, too. If it is all right, well and good ; if it isn't all right, let them say so.

RAKITIN: That sounds all right ; but where do I come in ? Truly, I don't see what I can do in the matter.

SHPIGELSKI: Oh, Mikhail Aleksandrych ! Don't I know that Natalia Petrovna respects you very much, and takes your advice quite often ? Mikhail Aleksandrych ! (*Embracing him*) Be a friend in need, and put in a good word in this case.

RAKITIN: And do you think that he will make a good husband for Viera ?

SHPIGELSKI (*assuming a serious look*): I am convinced of it. Don't you believe it ? You'll see. In married life, as you know, the main thing is that a man should have settled habits, and there isn't a man anywhere with more settled habits than Bolshintsov. (*Looks around.*) And here comes Natalia Petrovna. My dear fellow, my benefactor ! Just think, two chestnut horses and one bay horse ! Do what you can.

RAKITIN (*smiling*): All right, all right.

SHPIGELSKI: Well, then, I will depend upon you. (*Runs into the sitting-room.*)

RAKITIN (*looking after him*): What a bore that doctor is! Viera and Bolshintsov! Well, they may make a good pair at that. There are many marriages that take place that are worse than that. I'll do what I can for him, and let the rest take care of itself. (*He turns around.*)

[NATALIA PETROVNA comes in from the office, and seeing him, stops.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*hesitatingly*): Oh, is that you? I thought you were in the garden.

RAKITIN: Is my presence undesirable?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*interrupting him*): Stop your nonsense. (*Goes to the front of the stage.*) Are you here alone?

RAKITIN: Shpigelski has just gone out.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*puckering her forehead slightly*): Ah! That country Talleyrand! What did he tell you? Is he still here?

RAKITIN: That country Talleyrand, as you call him, doesn't seem to be in your good graces, to-day. Yesterday, I thought . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA: He is funny; he is entertaining; but he mixes into everybody's business. That's disagreeable. Moreover, with all his civility, he is very insolent and troublesome. In addition to that, he is quite a cynic.

RAKITIN (*going up to her*): You didn't speak of him that way, yesterday.

NATALIA PETROVNA: That's possible. (*Quickly*) But what did he tell you?

RAKITIN: He spoke to me about Bolshintsov.

NATALIA PETROVNA: About that fool?

RAKITIN: And you didn't feel that way about him, yesterday.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with a forced smile*): Yesterday isn't to-day.

RAKITIN: For everybody else, but apparently not for me.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*dropping her eyes*): How is that?

RAKITIN: For me, it is the same to-day, as it was yesterday.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*giving him her hand*): I understand your reproach, but you are mistaken. Yesterday, I would not have confessed to you that I am guilty . . . (RAKITIN *wants to interrupt her*.) Don't contradict me. I know that you know what I want to say. But to-day, I confess it. I have thought a great deal, to-day. Believe me, Michel, that, no matter what I say, no matter what I do, no matter what thoughts occupy my mind—I do not rely upon anyone as much as upon you. (*Lowering her voice*) I don't love anyone as much as I love you. (*Short pause.*) Don't you believe me?

RAKITIN: I believe you. But you are so down-hearted to-day. What's the matter with you?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*not hearing him, continues*): I am convinced of one thing, Rakitin. One cannot answer for oneself, nor can one guarantee for oneself. We often misunderstand our past, so how can we be responsible for our future? We cannot regulate the future.

RAKITIN: That's true.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*after a long silence*): Listen. I want to be frank with you. Maybe, I shall grieve you a little, but I know that my silence would grieve you more. I confess to you, Michel, that this young student, this Bieliaev, has made a very favourable and strong impression upon me.

RAKITIN (*semi-audibly*): I knew it.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Oh, you have noticed it? How long since you have noticed it?

RAKITIN: Since yesterday.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Hm !

RAKITIN: Two days ago, if you will recollect, I spoke to you about a change that had taken place in you. Then I didn't know to what to attribute it. But yesterday, after your conversation—up in the meadow— If you could only have seen yourself ! I didn't recognise you. You were a different person. You laughed, you jumped, you were as jolly as a little girl. Your eyes sparkled, your cheeks were rosy, and with what trustful curiosity, and with what joyful attention you looked at him, and how you smiled . . . (*Looking at her*) Even now, your face is brightening from the mere recollection of it ! (*Turns away.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA: No, Rakitin, for the Lord's sake, don't turn away from me. Listen ! Why do you exaggerate ? This young man has impressed me with his youthfulness, that's all. I have never been young, myself, Michel, not even in my childhood. You know my life. Not being accustomed to it, it has all gone to my head like wine, but I know that it will pass away as quickly as it came. It is hardly worth while talking about. (*After a moment's silence*) Don't turn away from me, don't take your hand away from me. Help me.

RAKITIN (*semi-audibly*): Help you ? That's a hard request. (*Aloud*) You know, yourself, Natalia Petrovna, what you are drifting towards. You believe that it isn't worth while talking about it, and yet you are asking for help. Apparently, you feel that you are in need of it.

NATALIA PETROVNA: That is, yes— I am turning to you for help, as to a friend.

RAKITIN (*bitterly*): Yes. Natalia Petrovna, I am willing to justify your confidence. . . . But let me come to myself.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Come to yourself? Are you feeling badly? Has any change taken place?

RAKITIN (*bitterly*): Oh, no. Everything is as before.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Then what are you thinking, Michel? Is it possible that you imagine—

RAKITIN: I don't imagine anything.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Is it possible that you despise me for—

RAKITIN: Stop, for God's sake! You'd better talk about Bolshintsov. The doctor is waiting for an answer concerning Viera.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*mournfully*): Are you mad at me?

RAKITIN: No, but I pity you.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Even that is aggravating to me, Michel. You ought to be ashamed—
(RAKITIN is silent. She shrugs her shoulders, and continues.) You say that the doctor is waiting for an answer? But who asked him to interfere in the matter?

RAKITIN: He assured me that you, yourself—

NATALIA PETROVNA (*interrupting him*): It is possible, it is possible. . . . Though I did not tell him anything definite. Moreover, I have a right to change my mind. And, after all, no harm is done. Shpigelski is busying himself with all sorts of things. Not everything ought to turn out successfully.

RAKITIN: He only wants to know what answer—

NATALIA PETROVNA: What answer? (*After a*

moment's silence) Michel ! Enough ! Give me your hand. What's the object of this indifference ? Of this cold politeness ? For what am I to blame ? Think yourself, am I to blame ? I came to you in hopes of hearing good advice. I didn't hesitate for one minute. I didn't think, even, of hiding anything from you. And you—— I see that my frankness with you has been to no purpose. You have not thought of anything ; you haven't suspected anything ; you have fooled me. And now, the Lord knows what you are thinking.

RAKITIN : What I am thinking ?

NATALIA PETROVNA : Give me your hand. (*He doesn't move. She continues, slightly insulted.*) You are positively turning away from me ? You will get the worst of it. However, I don't blame you. (*Scornfully*) You are jealous !

RAKITIN : I have no right to be jealous, Natalia Petrovna.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*after a moment's silence*) : As you feel about it. And as for Bolshintsov, I haven't spoken to Viera yet.

RAKITIN : I can send her in here at once.

NATALIA PETROVNA : Why at once ? However, as you wish.

RAKITIN (*turning in the direction of the office*) : So you want me to send her in ?

NATALIA PETROVNA : Michel ! For the last time ! You told me just a little while ago that you pitied me. Is this the way you pity me ? Is it possible——

RAKITIN (*coldly*) : Do you want me to send her in ?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*grievedly*) : Yes.

[RAKITIN goes into the office.

NATALIA PETROVNA, who has remained motionless

for some little while, sits down, takes a book from the table, opens it, and then lets it drop in her lap.

And he ! What does it mean ? He . . . And he ! And I depended upon him so much ! And Arkadi ? My God ! I haven't even thought of him. (*Straightening up a little*) I see it all now. It is time to stop all this.

[VIERA *enters from the office.*

(*quietly*) It is time to stop.

VIERA (*timidly*): Did you call me, Natalia Petrovna ?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*looking around quickly*): Oh, dear girl ! Yes, I did call you.

VIERA (*going up to her*): Aren't you well ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: I ? Yes, why ?

VIERA: It seemed to me . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA: No, it was just this. I got pretty warm, that's all. Sit down. (VIERA *sits down.*) Are you busy now ?

VIERA: No.

NATALIA PETROVNA: I asked you because I want to talk to you. I want to have a serious talk with you. You see, my dear, up to now, you have been a child. But now you are seventeen years old, and you are quite bright. . . . It's time for you to think about your future. You know that I love you as though you were my own daughter, that my house will always be yours. Yet, in the eyes of other people, you are an orphan and not rich. In time, you may become tired of living among strangers. Listen. Do you want to have a home of your own ? Do you want to be the mistress of your own house ?

VIERA (*slowly*): I—don't understand you, Natalia Petrovna.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*after a moment's silence*): You are sought in marriage. (VIERA *looks at her in great surprise.*) You didn't expect that? I confess, it seems rather strange to me, too. You are so young for that. I needn't tell you that I haven't the slightest intention of forcing you. In my opinion, it is a little soon for you to get married. Only, I considered it my duty to tell you about it. (VIERA *suddenly covers her face with her hands.*) Viera! What's the matter? Are you crying? (*Takes her by the hand.*) You are trembling! Are you afraid of me, Viera?

VIERA (*dully*): I am in your power, Natalia Petrovna.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*taking VIERA's hands away from her face*): Viera! Aren't you ashamed to cry? Aren't you ashamed to say that you are in my power? What do you take me for? I am talking to you as to a daughter of mine, and you . . . (VIERA *kisses her hand*) and you say that you are in my power! Now, you must stop crying, and I order you to laugh. I order you to laugh. (VIERA *smiles faintly.*) That's right. (NATALIA PETROVNA *embraces her with one arm and pulls her to her.*) Viera! My child! Be with me as you would be with your mother. Or, still better, imagine that I am your sister, and let's have a talk about these wonders. Do you want to?

VIERA: Yes.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well, then, listen to me. Move up nearer. So. First, as you are my sister, there is no need for me to assure you that you are here, as in your own house. Such pretty little eyes are at home everywhere. That means, then, that it must never occur to you that you are going to be a burden to anyone in this world, or that anyone wants to part with you. Do you hear me? But, some fine day, your sister will come to you and say, "Imagine,

VIERA ! You are sought in marriage. . . ." What will you answer her ? Will you say to her that you are still too young ; that you are not thinking about getting married ?

VIERA : Yes, ma'am.

NATALIA PETROVNA : Don't say " Yes, ma'am ! " You don't talk to a sister like that.

VIERA (*smiling*) : Well, yes.

NATALIA PETROVNA : Your sister will agree with you, and the suitor will be refused. And that will end it all. But suppose the suitor is a good man, well-to-do, willing to wait, and if all he asks is to visit you occasionally, in the hope that, in time, you may get to like him ?

VIERA : Who is the man ?

NATALIA PETROVNA : Ah, you are getting curious. Can you guess ?

VIERA : No.

NATALIA PETROVNA : You saw him to-day. (*VIERA blushes.*) To tell the truth, he is neither very handsome nor very young—Bolshintsov.

VIERA : Afanasi Ivanych !

NATALIA PETROVNA : Yes, Afanasi Ivanych.

VIERA (*looks at NATALIA PETROVNA for some time : suddenly begins to laugh, and then stops*) : Are you joking ?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*smiling*) : No, but I can see plainly that there is nothing more to do here for Bolshintsov. If you had cried at the mention of his name, there might have been some hope for him. But you began to laugh, so there is only one thing left for him to do : to go whence he came—home.

VIERA : Pardon me, but, truly, I didn't expect . . . Do people get married at his age ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: What do you think—how old is he? He isn't fifty. He's just at the marriageable age.

VIERA: Very likely. But he has such a peculiar face!

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well, we won't talk about it any more. He is dead and buried, and may the Lord be with him! I can understand that a man like Bolshintsov cannot be liked by a girl of your age. All you young girls want to marry for love rather than for reason. Isn't that so?

VIERA: Yes, Natalia Petrovna. Didn't you marry for love?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*after a moment's silence*): Surely for love. (*After another silence, during which she presses VIERA's hand*) Yes, Viera. I called you a girl, just now, but the girls are right. (*VIERA drops her eyes.*) And so, that matter is closed. Bolshintsov has retired. I must confess that I don't particularly like to see his puffed old face alongside of your pretty little one, although he is a good man. How quickly we have come to an understanding! (*Reproachfully*) You made a mistake in me, when you thought of me only as your benefactress. You know how I hate that word——

VIERA: Isn't that enough, Natalia Petrovna?

NATALIA PETROVNA: I am glad you admit it. I hope you are not afraid of me now.

VIERA: No, I love you and I am not afraid of you.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Thank you. That is—we are now great friends, and we shall not hide anything from one another. Well, suppose I should say to you, "Viera! Whisper to me. Is it just because Bolshintsov is older than you are,

and not handsome, that you don't want to marry him ? ”

VIERA : Isn't that enough, Natalia Petrovna ?

NATALIA PETROVNA : I don't deny it, but there is no other reason ?

VIERA : I don't know him at all.

NATALIA PETROVNA : That is true. But that's no answer to my question.

VIERA : I have no other reason.

NATALIA PETROVNA : Really and truly ? If that's the case, I'd advise you to think it over. I know it is hard to fall in love with Bolshintsov, but he, I repeat, is a good man. If you were in love with somebody else, it would be another thing. But your heart is still free.

VIERA (*timidly*) : How do you make that out ?

NATALIA PETROVNA : You don't love anybody yet, do you ?

VIERA : I love you, Kolia, and I also love Anna Semenovna.

NATALIA PETROVNA : No, no. I don't mean that kind of love. You don't quite understand me. I mean—a young man, from among the young men that you have seen here or while visiting. Haven't you taken a liking to any one of them ?

VIERA : No—— Some I liked, but . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA : I noticed that at a party given by the Krinitsyms, you danced three times with an army officer. What's his name ?

VIERA : With an officer ?

NATALIA PETROVNA : Yes. He had a very large moustache.

VIERA : Oh, that one ! No, I don't like him.

NATALIA PETROVNA : Well, and Shalanski ?

VIERA : Shalanski is a nice fellow, but he—I don't think he would care for me.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Why?

VIERA: He—he, I think, is thinking seriously about Liza Velski.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*looking at her*): Oh, you've noticed that, eh? (*Short silence.*) Well, how about Rakitin?

VIERA: I like Mikhail Aleksandrych very much. . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA: But more like a brother, isn't it? By the way, how about Bieliaev?

VIERA (*blushing*): Aleksiei Nikolaich! I like him.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*looking at VIERA*): He is a nice man, but he is so afraid of everybody.

VIERA (*naïvely*): Oh, not of everybody. He isn't afraid of me!

NATALIA PETROVNA: Uhu!

VIERA: He talks to me. Perhaps you think so because he is afraid of you. He hasn't had time to know you.

NATALIA PETROVNA: How do you know that he is afraid of me?

VIERA: He told me so.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Oh, he told you so? That means that he is more frank with you than with others.

VIERA: I don't know how he is with others, but with me—— Perhaps because we are both orphans. Then, he only thinks of me as of a little girl.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Do you think so? However, I like him, myself. He must be very kind-hearted.

VIERA: Very kind-hearted. If you only knew—everybody in the house loves him. He is so nice; he talks to everybody, and is always willing to

help everybody. Two days ago he took a poor old woman in his arms and carried her to the hospital. Once he picked a flower for me, at such a risk that I closed my eyes. I thought that he would fall and break his neck. But he is so nimble ! You, yourself, must have noticed it yesterday, while we were in the meadow.

NATALIA PETROVNA : Yes, that's true.

VIERA : Do you remember, when he ran after the kite, how he jumped over the ditch ? And that was easy for him.

NATALIA PETROVNA : And did he really pick a flower for you, in a very dangerous place ? It seems that he loves you.

VIERA (*after a moment's silence*) : And he is always so lively, always in good spirits.

NATALIA PETROVNA : That's somewhat strange. Why isn't he so in my presence——

VIERA (*interrupting her*) : I told you—because he doesn't know you. Wait. I'll tell him—I'll tell him that he needn't be afraid of you—isn't that all right ?—but that you are really kind !

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with a forced smile*) : Thank you.

VIERA : You'll see. . . . He minds me, although I am much younger than he is.

NATALIA PETROVNA : I didn't know that you were so friendly with him. Look out, Viera. Be careful. He is a very nice man, but you know, at your age . . . It isn't well . . . People may think . . . I called your attention to it, yesterday—do you remember ?—in the garden. (VIERA *drops her eyes*.) On the other hand, I don't want to stand in the way of your inclinations. I have great faith in you and in him. Still . . . Don't be angry with me, my dear, for my instructions. It is our old folks' privilege to bother you young people with rules. However, I may be saying

all this to no purpose. Isn't that right? You like him, and no more.

VIERA (*lifting her eyes, timidly*): He . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well, you are looking at me again, as before. Is that the way to look at a sister? Viera! Listen. Lean over towards me. (*Caressing her*) Suppose your real sister should say to you, "Viera, you surely don't love anybody?" What would you answer her? (*VIERA looks at NATALIA PETROVNA, doubtfully.*) These little eyes of yours do want to tell me something! (*VIERA suddenly puts her head down on NATALIA PETROVNA's breast. NATALIA PETROVNA grows pale, and after a moment's silence continues*) You love? Tell me, do you love?

VIERA (*not lifting her head*): Oh, I don't know what is the matter with me. . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA: Dear girl! You are in love. (*VIERA presses her face closer against her breast.*) You are in love. And he——? Viera! And he——

VIERA (*without moving*): Why are you asking me? I don't know. Maybe he is. I don't know. I don't know. (*NATALIA PETROVNA shudders and then remains immovable. VIERA lifts her head, and suddenly notices the change in her face.*) Natalia Petrovna! What is the matter with you?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*coming to herself*): With me? Nothing. Why?—Nothing.

VIERA: You are so pale, Natalia Petrovna! What is the matter with you? I'll call someone. (*Gets up.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA: No, no. Don't call. It isn't anything. It will pass. It has already passed.

VIERA: Let me call somebody.

NATALIA PETROVNA: On the contrary, I want to be alone. Leave me. Do you hear? We'll talk some more another time. Go.

VIERA: You are not angry with me, Natalia Petrovna?

NATALIA PETROVNA: I? For what? Not at all. On the contrary, I am very thankful to you for your confidence in me. Only, leave me now, please.

[VIERA *wants to take her hand, but NATALIA PETROVNA turns away, as though not noticing it.*

VIERA (*with tears in her eyes*): Natalia Petrovna! . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA: Leave me, I ask you.

[VIERA *slowly withdraws to the office.*

NATALIA PETROVNA (*alone, sits for some time, immovable*).

Now, everything is clear to me: these children love one another. (*Stops talking and passes her hand over her face.*) Well? So much the better. May the Lord bless them. (*Laughs.*) And I . . . I could think . . . (*Stops again.*) She soon gave her secret away. I confess, I hadn't even suspected it. Moreover, I acknowledge that this bit of news has surprised me. But, let's wait. Everything isn't over. My God! What am I talking about? What is the matter with me? I do not recognise myself. How I have let myself go! (*A moment's silence.*) What am I trying to do? I am trying to marry off a young girl to an old man. I am commissioning the doctor to do it; he guesses my intentions, makes remarks. . . . Arkadi! Rakitin! . . . And I! . . . (*Shivers, and raises her head suddenly.*) What does all this mean in the final analysis? I am jealous of Viera; I—am I in love with him, or what? (*A moment's silence*) And you are still in doubt about it? You are in love, you most unfortunate creature! How did it all happen?—

I don't know. Have I been poisoned? Suddenly, everything is broken, scattered and carried away. . . . He is afraid of me. Everybody is afraid of me. What could he see in me? What would he want of a creature like myself? He is young, and she is young, but I—(*bitterly*)—How can he appreciate me? They are both foolish, as Rakitin said. Oh, how I hate that wise man! And Arkadi! My trustful, good Arkadi! Oh, Lord. Oh, Lord! This will be the death of me. (*Gets up.*) I think I am losing my mind. Why should I exaggerate? Yes, I am defeated. This is all strange to me, because it is for the first time. Yes, for the first time! It is the first time in my life that I love. (*She sits down again.*) He must leave—yes—and Rakitin too. It is time for me to come to my senses. I permitted myself to go a little astray and this is the result. It has gone too far. And what do I like in him? (*Thoughtfully*) Here is this terrible feeling. . . . Arkadi! Yes, I'll fall back into his arms, and plead with him to forgive me, to protect me, to save me. He . . . and no one else. All others are strangers to me, and must remain so. Only . . . Is there no other way out of it? This girl is nothing but a child. She might have erred. It is all childishness. Nothing else. From what do I—I will explain myself to him. I will ask him. (*Reproachfully*) Oh, you are still hoping, you still want to hope? What can I hope for? My God! Don't let me despair in myself. (*Drops her head into her hands.*)

[RAKITIN enters from the office. Looks pale and alarmed.]

RAKITIN (*going up to NATALIA PETROVNA*): Natalia Petrovna! (*She doesn't move. Semi-audibly*) I wonder what happened between her and Viera? (*Aloud*) Natalia Petrovna!

NATALIA PETROVNA (*lifting her head*): Who is it? Oh, it is you.

RAKITIN: Viera Aleksandrovna told me that you weren't feeling well, so I——

NATALIA PETROVNA (*turning away from him*): I am well. I don't know what made her think that.

RAKITIN: No, Natalia Petrovna, you are not well. Look at yourself.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well, it is possible. But what is it to you? What do you want? Why did you come in?

RAKITIN (*touched*): I will tell you why I came in. I came in to ask your pardon. Half an hour ago I was inexpressibly foolish and harsh with you. Pardon me. Do you see, Natalia Petrovna? No matter how modest one's wishes, and . . . and hopes, it isn't hard for a man to forget himself, though only for a moment, when they are suddenly taken away from him. But now, I have come to myself, and I understand my circumstances and my guilt. . . . And I wish only one thing, and that is your forgiveness. (*He sits down near her, quietly.*) Look at me; don't turn away from me. There is before you your former Rakitin, your friend; the man who doesn't ask for anything—except to be of service to you, or, as you expressed it, to be a help to you. Do not deprive me of your confidence. Do with me as you like, and don't forget, that sometime . . . Forget all that could have offended——

NATALIA PETROVNA (*who has been looking fixedly at the floor*): Yes, yes. (*Stopping*) Pardon me, Rakitin. I haven't heard a single word you said.

RAKITIN (*gloomily*): I said—I asked your pardon, Natalia Petrovna. I asked your permission to remain your friend.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*slowly turning in his direction and putting her hands on his shoulders*): Rakitin! Tell me, what is the matter with me?

RAKITIN (*after a thoughtful pause*): You are in love.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*slowly repeating after him*): I am in love. . . . But that's nonsense, Rakitin! That's impossible. Can it happen so suddenly. . . . You say that I am in love. . . . (*Silence.*)

RAKITIN: Yes, poor woman, you are in love. Don't fool yourself.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*not looking at him*): What is there left, then, for me to do?

RAKITIN: I am willing to tell you, Natalia Petrovna, if you will promise me—

NATALIA PETROVNA (*interrupting him, and not looking at him*): Do you know that Viera loves him? They are both in love with each other.

RAKITIN: If that is the case, it is one cause more—

NATALIA PETROVNA (*again interrupting him*): I have suspected it right along, but just now she confessed it to me . . . confessed.

RAKITIN (*semi-audibly*): Poor woman!

NATALIA PETROVNA (*brushing her hand across her face*): Well, however, it is time to come to my senses. I think you wanted to tell me something. . . . Advise me, for heaven's sake, what to do.

RAKITIN: I am willing to advise you, Natalia Petrovna, but only on one condition.

NATALIA PETROVNA: What is that?

RAKITIN: Promise me that you won't suspect my intentions. Tell me that you have faith in my . . . desire to help you impartially. Thus, you will help me. Your faith in me will give me the strength. Otherwise, I would rather not say anything.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Speak, speak!

RAKITIN: Then you don't doubt my intentions?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Speak!

RAKITIN: Well, listen. He must leave. (NATALIA PETROVNA *looks at him silently.*) Yes, he must leave. I am not going to tell you about your husband, about your duties to him. Such words would be out of place from my lips. But these children do love one another. You yourself told me that just now. Then imagine yourself coming between them. You would suffer.

NATALIA PETROVNA: He must go away. . . .
(*After a moment's silence*) And you . . . you will remain?

RAKITIN (*agitatedly*): I . . . I . . . (*Short pause.*) I must go away, too. For your peace, for your happiness; for the happiness of Viera, he and I both of us, must leave for ever. . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA: Rakitin! I had gone so far that I was ready to marry off this poor girl—this orphan, who was entrusted to me by my mother—to a foolish, funny, old man. I lacked the courage, Rakitin. The words died on my lips when she laughed in answer to my proposition. But I had made a compact with that doctor, and let him smile quite a little. I bore those smiles, his pleasantries, and his remarks. . . . Oh, I feel that I am on the brink of an abyss. Save me!

RAKITIN: Natalia Petrovna! You see that I was right. (*She is silent. He continues*) He must leave—we must leave. There is no other way out for you.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*languidly*): But what shall I live for, afterwards?

RAKITIN: My God! Has it gone so far? Natalia Petrovna! You will get well again, believe me. It will all pass. What do you mean—what will you live for?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes, yes, what shall I live for, when everybody has left me?

RAKITIN: But . . . your family? (NATALIA PETROVNA *drops her eyes.*) Listen. If you want me to, after he has gone, I will remain for several days, that I may——

NATALIA PETROVNA (*dully*): I understand you. You are figuring on my habits, on our former friendship. You are hoping that I will come to myself, and will return to you. Isn't that so? I understand you.

RAKITIN (*blushing*): Natalia Petrovna! Why are you insulting me?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*bitterly*): I understand you. Don't you fool yourself.

RAKITIN: After all your promises, after all that I have done for you, for you only, for your happiness, for your reputation——

NATALIA PETROVNA: How long since you have been worrying about that? Why have you never spoken to me about that before?

RAKITIN (*getting up*): Natalia Petrovna! I shall leave here immediately, and you will never see me again. (*Starts to go.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA (*giving him her hand*): Michel! Pardon me. I do not know what I am saying. You see in what condition I am. Pardon me.

[RAKITIN quickly returns to her and takes her hand.

RAKITIN: Natalia Petrovna! . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA: Oh, Michel! It is unbearably hard for me. (*She leans against his shoulder and puts her handkerchief to her eyes.*) Help me! I am lost without you. . . .

[At this moment the sitting-room door opens. ISLAEV and ANNA SEMENOVNA enter.

ISLAEV (*loudly*): I have always been of the opinion . . .

[*He stops in astonishment, on seeing RAKITIN and NATALIA PETROVNA. NATALIA PETROVNA looks around and then goes out quickly. RAKITIN remains, but he is quite upset.*]

(*to RAKITIN*) What does this mean? What has been going on?

RAKITIN: Nothing. . . . It——

ISLAEV: Isn't she well, or what?

RAKITIN: N-o . . . n-o . . .

ISLAEV: Why did she run away so quickly? What were you talking about with her? She was crying. Were you trying to comfort her, or what was happening?

RAKITIN: Truly, nothing.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: How was it nothing, Mikhail Aleksandrych? (*Pause.*) I will go and see. (*Starts to go into the office.*)

RAKITIN (*stopping her*): No, you had better leave her to herself, now, please.

ISLAEV: What does it all mean? Tell me.

RAKITIN: Nothing. I swear, nothing. Listen to me. I promise to explain it all to you both, to-day. I give you my word for it. But now, if you have any confidence in me at all, don't ask me about anything, and leave Natalia Petrovna alone.

ISLAEV: All right. Only, it is quite surprising to me. Such things have never happened with Natasha before. It is quite unusual.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: What I should like to know, is what made her weep, and why she went away. Are we strangers here?

RAKITIN: That wasn't it. Listen to me. I must confess that we hadn't finished our conversation.

I must ask you both to leave us alone for a little while.

ISLAEV: Oh, is that it? That means that you have secrets.

RAKITIN: Secrets? But you will know them.

ISLAEV (*after a moment's thought*): Come, Mother. Let's leave them to themselves. Let them finish their secret conversation.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: But—

ISLAEV: Come, come. You heard him promise to explain.

RAKITIN: You can be sure about that.

ISLAEV (*coldly*): Oh, I am quite sure about that.
(*To ANNA SEMENOVNA*) Come.

[*Both go out. RAKITIN, after they have gone, goes to the office quickly.*]

RAKITIN: Natalia Petrovna! Natalia Petrovna! Come out, please.

[*NATALIA PETROVNA comes out from the office, very pale.*]

NATALIA PETROVNA: What did they say?

RAKITIN: Nothing. Calm yourself. They were somewhat surprised. Your husband thought that you were not well. He noticed your agitation. Sit down; you are hardly able to stand. (*NATALIA PETROVNA sits down.*) I told him—I asked him not to disturb you; to leave us alone for a while.

NATALIA PETROVNA: And he consented?

RAKITIN: Yes. I had to promise him, though, that I would explain everything to him tomorrow. Why did you go away?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*bitterly*): Why? But what are you going to tell him?

RAKITIN: I—oh, I'll think up something. That

isn't in order now. We must make good use of our time. You see, this cannot go on any longer. You are unable to bear similar incidents. They are not worthy of you. I, myself . . . But, let's not talk about it. You try to be a little more firm, and—I'll take care of myself. You agree with me——

NATALIA PETROVNA: In what?

RAKITIN: In the necessity for our leaving. Do you agree? If that is the case, there is no use remaining here. If you will permit me, I will have a talk with Bieliaev, immediately. He is an honourable man, and will understand——

NATALIA PETROVNA: What will you say to him? You? What can you say to him?

RAKITIN (*with some agitation*): I . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA (*after a pause*): Rakitin! Doesn't it seem to you that we are both out of our minds? I was frightened, frightened you, and, most likely, all for nothing.

RAKITIN: How is that?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Really, what is the matter with us? Not so very long ago, everything seemed so quiet, so peaceful, and so calm in this house, and suddenly—where did it all come from? Truly, we must have all lost our minds. Enough! We have been acting foolishly long enough. Let's resume our former mode of life. You don't have to explain anything to Arkadi. I shall tell him myself about our pranks. And he and I will have a good laugh over it. I am not in need of a mediator between my husband and myself.

RAKITIN: Natalia Petrovna! Now you are frightening me. You are smiling, and at the same time you are as pale as death. Try and remember what you told me half or three quarters of an hour ago.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Lots of things have happened. However, I see the trouble, now. You want to start this tempest, in order that you may not drown, yourself.

RAKITIN: Again, again you are suspecting me. Again you are reproaching me, Natalia Petrovna. May the Lord forgive you, but you are certainly tormenting me! Or you are repenting your frankness.

NATALIA PETROVNA: I am not repenting anything.

RAKITIN: How can I understand you?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*quickly*): Rakitin! If you say a single word about me to Bieliaev, I will never forgive you.

RAKITIN: Oh, is that it? Be sure, Natalia Petrovna, I am not only not going to say anything about you to him, but I won't even say good-bye to him, when I leave. I have no desire to force my services upon anybody.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with some agitation*): Perhaps you think that I have changed my mind concerning his leaving here?

RAKITIN: I am not thinking anything.

NATALIA PETROVNA: On the contrary, I am so convinced of the necessity, as you say, for his leaving here, that I, myself, am going to discharge him. (*Pause.*) I, myself, will tell him that.

RAKITIN: You?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes, I. And at once, too. I ask you to send him in here.

RAKITIN: Right now?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Right now. I ask you to do this for me, Rakitin. You see, I am very composed, now. Moreover, no one will disturb me. I must make use of this. . . . I shall be very much obliged to you. I shall question him.

RAKITIN: But he won't tell you anything. He himself told me that he doesn't feel at ease in your presence.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*suspiciously*): Oh, you have already spoken to him about me? (RAKITIN *shrugs his shoulders*.) Pardon me, pardon me, Michel, and send him in here. You'll see, I will discharge him, and everything will be over. Everything will pass, and be forgotten, like a bad dream. Please send him in here. I must have a final talk with him. You will be satisfied with it. Please, send him in.

RAKITIN (*who hasn't taken his eyes from her: coldly and gloomily*): As you like. Your wish shall be fulfilled. (*Goes to the sitting-room door.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA: Thank you, Michel.

RAKITIN (*turning around*): Oh, don't thank me for it, anyway. (*Quickly goes into the sitting-room.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA (*alone, after a short pause*): He is a very nice man, but is it possible that I ever loved him? (*She gets up.*) He is right. That man ought to leave. But how am I going to discharge him? All I want to know is whether he really loves the girl or not. Very likely it is all nonsense. . . . How could I get so wrought up about it? How could I show so much sentimentality? Well, there is nothing more to be done about it, now. I am anxious to know what he will have to say. But he must leave here. Positively, positively. Maybe he won't want to answer me. He is afraid of me. Well, so much the better, for I haven't very much to say to him. (*Puts her hand to her forehead.*) Oh, how my head aches! Shall I postpone it until to-morrow? It seems to me that I am being watched to-day. How far things have gone! No, I'd better get it over with at once. One last effort, and I will be free. Oh, yes. I long for freedom and calm.

[BIELIAEV *enters from the sitting-room.*

BIELIAEV (*going up to her*): Natalia Petrovna ! Mikhail Aleksandrych told me that you wanted to see me.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with some effort*): Yes, exactly. I want to have an understanding with you.

BIELIAEV: An understanding ?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*not looking at him*): Yes . . . an understanding. (*Pause.*) Let me tell you, Aleksiei Nikolaich, that I—I am dissatisfied with your services.

BIELIAEV: May I know the reason ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Listen to me. I—I—truly, I don't know how to begin. However, I must tell you that my dissatisfaction is not due to any omission on your part. On the contrary, your behaviour towards Kolia has pleased me very much.

BIELIAEV: Then what can it be ?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*looking at him*): You are worrying over nothing, for your fault isn't very great. You are young, and, evidently, you have never lived out. You couldn't foresee—

BIELIAEV: But, Natalia Petrovna—

NATALIA PETROVNA: You want to know the reason ? I fully realise your impatience, and so I must tell you that Viera—(*looking at him*)—Viera has confessed it all to me.

BIELIAEV (*surprised*): Viera Aleksandrovna ! What could Viera Aleksandrovna have confessed to you ? And how does it concern me ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: And you don't know what she could have confessed ? Can't you guess ?

BIELIAEV: I ? Not at all.

NATALIA PETROVNA: If that is the case, pardon me. If you cannot guess, I must ask your forgiveness. I thought—I have made a mistake.

But, permit me to remark, I do not believe you. I fully understand what makes you say that. I respect your modesty very much.

BIELIAEV: I positively do not understand you, Natalia Petrovna.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Really? Do you really believe that you can convince me that you haven't noticed the disposition of the child, Viera, towards you?

BIELIAEV: Viera's disposition towards me? I don't know what to say to this. I think that I have always been with Viera Aleksandrovna as—

NATALIA PETROVNA: As with everybody else. Isn't that true? (*Short pause.*) However, whether you really don't know, or you merely pretend that you don't know, the case is this: the girl is in love with you. She herself has told me about it. Well, now I ask you, as a respectable man, what you are willing to do?

BIELIAEV (*with some agitation*): What am I willing to do?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*crossing her arms*): Yes.

BIELIAEV: Oh, this is so unexpected, Natalia Petrovna! . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA (*after a short pause*): Aleksiei Nikolaich! I see that I haven't approached this matter in the right way. You haven't understood me; you think that I am displeased with you; that I—I am only a little nervous, and that is quite natural. Calm yourself. Sit down. (*Both sit down.*) I am going to be very frank with you, Aleksiei Nikolaich, and you must try to place a little confidence in me. I am sure you have no reason to be afraid of me. Viera loves you, and you are not to blame for it. I am willing to say in advance that you are not guilty. But you see, Aleksiei Nikolaich, she is an orphan, and in my care. I am responsible for her, for her

future, and for her happiness. She is quite young yet, and I believe that the feeling which you have inspired in her will soon disappear. At her age, love doesn't last. Understand me, I feel it my duty to tell you. To play with fire is somewhat dangerous, and I do not doubt that you, knowing her affection for you, will change your behaviour towards her. You will avoid seeing her and walking in the garden with her. Am I right? Can I depend upon you? I should have been afraid with anyone else, to talk so frankly.

BIELIAEV: Natalia Petrovna! believe me, I can appreciate——

NATALIA PETROVNA: I am telling you now that I do not doubt you for one minute. Moreover, it will remain a secret between us.

BIELIAEV: To be frank, Natalia Petrovna, all this that you have told me seems strange to me—surely, I do not dare to disbelieve you, but——

NATALIA PETROVNA: Listen, Aleksiei Nikolaich! All that I have told you now, I have told you believing, that for your part—there is absolutely nothing. (*Interrupting herself*) However, though I know you very little, as yet, I know you well enough to see no cause for standing in the way of your intentions. You are not rich, but you are young and you have a future before you. And when two people love one another—I repeat to you, I considered it my duty to call your attention to it, as you are an honest man, to the possible consequences of your acquaintance with Viera. But if you——

BIELIAEV (*not understanding*): Truly, I don't know, Natalia Petrovna, what you are trying to say.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*quickly*): Oh, believe me, I do not demand a confession from you. I know

without that—I know from your behaviour how the matter stands. (*Looking at him*) However, I must tell you that it seemed to Viera that you were not indifferent to her.

BIELIAEV (*getting up, after a short pause*): Natalia Petrovna ! I can see very plainly that I must not remain in this house any longer.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*quickly*): You might have waited until I had given you your dismissal. (*Gets up.*)

BIELIAEV: You were frank with me, so let me be frank with you. I do not love Viera Aleksandrovna. At least, I do not love her as you think I do.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Do I—— (*Stops short.*)

BIELIAEV: And if Viera Aleksandrovna likes me, and if it has seemed to her that I wasn't, as you said, indifferent to her, I do not want to deceive her, and I myself am going to tell her the whole truth. But after such an explanation, you will understand, Natalia Petrovna, that it will be impossible for me to remain here. My position would be awfully embarrassing. I am not going to tell you how hard it will be for me to leave your house—I haven't anything else to do, this summer. I shall always think of you gratefully. Permit me to go, now. I shall still have the honour of bidding you good-bye.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with assumed indifference*): As you like. But I must acknowledge that I hadn't expected this. This wasn't at all what I wanted to have an understanding about. I only wanted to warn you that Viera is still a child. Perhaps I attributed too much seriousness to it. I do not see the necessity for your leaving the house. However, you can do as you like.

BIELIAEV: Natalia Petrovna ! Truly, it is impossible for me to remain here any longer.

NATALIA PETROVNA: It seems to be very easy for you to part with us.

BIELIAEV: No, Natalia Petrovna, it isn't easy.

NATALIA PETROVNA: I am not in the habit of keeping people against their will, but I must admit that this is very disagreeable to me.

BIELIAEV (*after some hesitation*): Natalia Petrovna! I don't want to be the cause of your annoyance, in the least. Therefore, I will remain.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*suspiciously*): Ah? (*Pause.*) I didn't expect you would change your decision so quickly. I am very thankful to you, but you will permit me to think it over. Perhaps you are right. Perhaps it is best for you to go away. I will think it over, and let you know. Will you permit me to keep you in suspense until this evening?

BIELIAEV: I am willing to wait as long as you think necessary. (*Bows and starts to go.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA: Do you promise me——

BIELIAEV (*stopping*): What?

NATALIA PETROVNA: I think you wanted to have a talk with Viera. I do not know whether that would be proper or not. However, I will let you know. I am beginning to think that it would be best for you to go away. Good-bye. (*BIELIAEV bows and goes into the sitting-room.*

NATALIA PETROVNA *looks after him.*) Now I am satisfied. He does not love her. (*Paces the room a little.*) And so, instead of dismissing him, I have really detained him. He will remain. . . . But what am I going to tell Rakitin? What have I done? (*Pause.*) And what right did I have to proclaim the love of this girl? I myself coaxed it out of her. And so pitilessly! So mercilessly! . . . (*Covers her eyes with her hands.*) Perhaps he had just begun to love her. By what right did I destroy under my feet that flower in its bud? Have I destroyed it? Perhaps he has only fooled

me. For I wanted to fool him. Oh, no. He is too honourable for that. He isn't the same as I am. And why was I in such a hurry? I gave away everything. (*Sighs.*) Lots of things happen. If I could only have foreseen how cunningly I would play, how I would lie to him! And he—how bravely and freely he spoke to me! I bow before him. He is a man. I haven't known him until now. . . . He must go away. Should he remain, I feel that I would lose every bit of self-respect. He must go away, or I shall go to pieces. I am going to write to him, before he has a chance to see Viera, and tell him that he must go away. (*Quickly goes into the office.*)

CURTAIN

· ACT IV

The stage represents a large room. Nothing on the walls. The floor is of stone, and uneven. Six white-washed brick columns, peeled off in places, three on each side, support the ceiling. On the left are two open windows and a door leading into the garden. On the right, a door leading into the corridor, which, in turn, leads to the main house. In the background, an iron door which leads to the storehouse. Near the first column on the right stands a green garden bench. In one corner are several spades, funnels, and pots. It is evening. The red sun rays fall through the open window, on the floor.

KATIA enters from the door on the right, quickly goes up to the window, and looks for some time into the garden.

KATIA: No, I can't see anyone, and I was told that he had gone into the conservatory. Maybe he hasn't come out from there. Well, perhaps I had better wait until he has passed by. He has no other road. *(She sighs, and gets closer to the window.)* It is said that he is going away. *(Sighs again.)* What are we going to do without him? Poor Miss — ! How she asked me. . . . Well, why shouldn't I oblige her? Let them have a last talk. How hot it is to-day! And I think it is going to rain. *(Looks out of the window again, and draws back quickly.)* Are they coming here? That's right, they are coming here. Oh, my God! *(She starts to run away, but gets only half-way to the door, when SHPIGELSKI and LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA come in from the garden. KATIA hides behind a column.)*

SHPIGELSKI *(shaking the rain from his hat)*: We can wait here until the rain is over. It will soon be over.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: Very likely.

SHPIGELSKI *(looking around)*: What kind of a building is this? A storehouse, or what?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*pointing to the iron door*): No, that is where the storehouse is. This is a vestibule. It is said that Arkadi Sergieich's father built it on, when he returned from abroad.

SHFIGELSKI: Oh, I see. It is Venetian style. (*Sits down on the bench.*) Let's sit down. (*She sits down.*) Confess, Lizaveta Bogdanovna, that the rain was not opportune. It interrupted our conversation in the most affectionate part.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*dropping her eyes*): Ignati Ilich ! . . .

SHFIGELSKI: But no one is in the way of our renewing it here. By the way, did you say that Anna Semenovna was not in good spirits to-day ?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: Yes. She even had her dinner served in her room.

SHFIGELSKI: Is that so ? How unfortunate !

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: This morning she saw Natalia Petrovna weeping, with Mikhail Aleksandrych. To be sure, he is one of the family. Still . . . However, Mikhail Aleksandrych promised to explain it all.

SHFIGELSKI: Oh, I think she is taking it to heart without cause. Mikhail Aleksandrych, in my opinion, never has been a dangerous man, and now less than ever.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: Why ?

SHFIGELSKI: Oh, just because. He talks so wisely. Some people are a little rash, but these wise men only talk. You, Lizaveta Bogdanovna, should never fear such babblers. They are not dangerous. But those who do not talk, and those who are a little foolish, temperamental—they are dangerous.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*after a moment's silence*): Tell me, is Natalia Petrovna really sick?

SHPIGELSKI: She is no more sick than you and I are.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: She didn't eat anything at dinner.

SHPIGELSKI: No real sickness takes the appetite away.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: Did you have your dinner at Bolshintsov's?

SHPIGELSKI: Yes, I had dinner with him. I went there, and I returned only for your sake, so help me God!

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: Oh! Do you know, Ignati Ilich, why Natalia Petrovna is mad at you? She didn't speak very kindly about you at the table to-day.

SHPIGELSKI: Really? It is very evident, then, that the ladies don't like to see their favourites in love. They expect one to do as they want, to help them, and to make believe that one doesn't understand anything. Just think of it! Well, we'll see. And Rakitin, I think, sticks up his nose.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: Yes, he doesn't seem to be in a good mood to-day, either.

SHPIGELSKI: Hm! How about Viera Aleksandrovna and Bieliaev?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: Nobody, positively nobody is in a good mood to-day. Really, I am at a loss to know what is the matter with them all.

SHPIGELSKI: If you know too much, you will get old too fast, Lizaveta Bogdanovna. Well, well, may the Lord bless them all. Let's talk about our own affairs. You see, the rain hasn't stopped yet. Do you want to?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*affectedly dropping her eyes*): Why do you ask me, Ignati Ilich?

SHPIGELSKI: Lizaveta Bogdanovna! Let me ask you: What pleasure do you get in being affected, in dropping your eyes like that? We are not youngsters. Such manners, such affectations, such sighs—they are not becoming to us. Let us talk quietly, to the point, as it behoves people of our age. And so, this is the point: we like one another. At least, I imagine that you like me.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*less affectedly*): Ignati Ilich! Truly . . .

SHPIGELSKI: Well, all right. You, as a woman, really have to—I suppose—(*waves his hand*)—be a little coquettish. It is settled, then, that you and I like each other. And in other respects I think we are also well matched. I—about myself, must say that I am not a man of high birth. Well, and you are not of very great family. I am not a very rich man. If I were—I wouldn't—(*Laughs.*) I have a pretty good practice. Not all my patients die. You, according to your own statement, have fifteen thousand in actual cash. That will come in handy. Moreover, I imagine that you are sick of being governess and companion to this old woman, of helping her out in Preference, and of saying "yes" to everything she says. That isn't a very interesting life. As far as I am concerned, I can't say exactly that I am tired of being a bachelor, but I am getting a little old, and my housekeeper is simply robbing me. But, this is really where the hardship comes in, Lizaveta Bogdanovna: we don't know anything at all about each other. That is—to be more truthful about it—you don't know me. I know you; I fully understand your character. I can't say that you haven't any shortcomings. You, having been a maiden lady for so long, have become a little bit fussy, but that doesn't matter. In the hands of a good husband, a wife is like a piece

of soft wax. But I want you to know something about me before marrying me. Otherwise you may find fault with me. I don't want to deceive you.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*with dignity*): But, Ignati Ilich, I also have had occasion to learn something about your character.

SHPIGELSKI: You? Oh, nonsense. That isn't a woman's business. You, I am sure, think that I am a very jolly man, quite an entertainer.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: It has always seemed to me that you are a very kind man.

SHPIGELSKI: That is it. You see how easy it is to make a mistake. Because I always make fun among strangers, tell them jokes, and try to please them, you think that I am a kind and jolly man. If I didn't stand in need of those strangers, I should never look at them. Wherever it is possible, without any danger, I generally make fun of the people themselves. However, I don't deceive myself. Some people who need me, who couldn't get along without me for a minute, who feel very gloomy in my absence, consider it their right to despise me. But, I don't remain indebted to them. To mention even Natalia Petrovna—don't you think I understand her thoroughly? (*Mimics her.*) "Dear doctor! Truly, I love you a great deal. You have—you have such a malicious tongue!" Ha, ha, ha! You can be as demonstrative as you like. Oh, these ladies! They smile at us so and they twinkle their eyes at us, but odiousness is written all over their faces. They dislike us fellows, but what can we do? I know why she spoke unkindly about me to-day. The ladies are peculiar people. Because they use eau-de-Cologne daily, and use careless language, as though they couldn't find better words, they think that no one is their equal. Well, it doesn't

matter. They are just as mortal as we poor sinners are.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: Ignati Ilich ! You surprise me.

SHPIGELSKI: I knew that I would surprise you. Now you can see that I am not at all of a jolly disposition, and perhaps not even very kind. But, I don't want to be taken by you for what I never have been. No matter how funny I appear in the presence of other people, no one ever dares to call me a fool. No one ever dares to snap his fingers in my face. In fact, I can say that some of them are even a little afraid of me, because they know that I bite when they snap. Once, about three years ago, a gentleman with a sort of swarthy complexion, out of mere foolishness, took a radish off the table and shoved it into my hair. And what do you think I did ? That same moment, very quietly, and very composedly, in a most polite manner, I challenged him to a duel. He was nearly paralysed with fright. The host offered to apologise. The effect of it was most unusual. I must admit, though, that I knew beforehand that he wouldn't fight. Well, so you see, Elizaveta Bogdanovna, there is no end to my selfishness. But such is life. My talent is not wonderful. I studied somehow. I am not a very good doctor. I needn't hide this fact from you, and if you ever get sick after we're married, I shall not be the one to treat you. If I had had talent, education, and a good bringing up, I wouldn't have stayed here. I would have moved to the capital. These country inhabitants don't need a better doctor. As for my personal habits, I must tell you, Elizaveta Bogdanovna, that at home I am very morose, silent and exacting. I don't get mad if I am pleased and properly served. I like to have people study my habits and feed me well. Moreover, I am neither jealous nor stingy. In my absence, you will have the right to do everything you like. Of course,

there is nothing to say about the romantic side of our love, you understand. Nevertheless, I imagine that one can live under the same roof with me. All one needs to do is to please me, and not to weep in my presence. That I hate. I am not quarrelsome. Well, this is my confession. What have you to say to it?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: What shall I say, Ignati Ilich? If you haven't blackened yourself on purpose——

SHPIGELSKI: How have I blackened myself? Don't forget that anyone else in my place would have remained silent about his shortcomings. For you hadn't noticed anything. And after marriage it would have been too late. But I am too proud to hide these things. (LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA *looks at him*.) Yes, yes, I am too proud, even though you do look at me that way. I have no intention of hiding anything from, or lying to, my future wife. I wouldn't do it for fifteen thousand, or even for a hundred thousand. But to a stranger, I would do it for a mere nothing. Such are my habits. I will flatter a stranger, and at the same time be thinking, "What a fool you are, my dear fellow! How easily you are caught." But to you, I say what I think. That is—I do not tell you all that I am thinking, but I am not deceiving you. I must seem to you quite odd, but have patience, and I will tell you the whole story of my life, some day. You will be surprised to know how much I am still like myself. You, I dare say, weren't brought up from childhood with a gold spoon in your mouth. Still, you cannot imagine what it really means—strict poverty. However, I will tell you about all this some other time. Now, you had better take into consideration what I have already told you. Judge the facts, as a whole, by yourself, and let me know your conclusion. You, as far as I have noticed,

are a sensible woman. By the way, how old are you ?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: I—I—I am thirty years old.

SHPIGELSKI (*calmly*): That isn't true. You are surely over forty.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*firing up*): Not forty, but thirty-six.

SHPIGELSKI: Well, that isn't thirty. Well, Lizaveta Bogdanovna, you must get out of that habit. . . . Especially, when a married woman isn't considered old at thirty-six. Your snuffing tobacco is a bad habit, too. (*Getting up*) I think the rain has stopped.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*also getting up*): Yes, it has stopped.

SHPIGELSKI: And so, you will let me know in a few days ?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: I shall give you my decision to-morrow.

SHPIGELSKI: That's good. I like that. That's pretty wise. Hurrah for Lizaveta Bogdanovna ! Well, give me your arm. We'll go into the house.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*giving him her arm*): Let's go.

SHPIGELSKI: By the way, I haven't kissed your hand. It is necessary. Well, so be it. (*Kisses her hand. She blushes.*) So. (*They start towards the door.*)

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*stopping*): Ignati Ilich ! So you think that Mikhail Aleksandrych isn't really a dangerous man ?

SHPIGELSKI: No, I don't think he is.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: Do you know, Ignati Ilich, it has seemed to me that Natalia Petrovna, for some time . . . it has seemed to me that Mr. Bieliaev . . . She pays him quite a little attention. And Viera, too. What do you think ? Wasn't that the cause of the trouble to-day—

SHPIGELSKI (*interrupting her*): I forgot to tell you one other thing, Lizaveta Bogdanovna. I am very curious, but I hate curious women. That is—let me explain what I mean. In my opinion a woman ought to be a little curious and observing; in fact, that would be very beneficial for her husband. But only about others. You understand me, of course—curious and observing of others. However, if you must know my opinion of Natalia Petrovna, Viera Aleksandrovna, Mr. Bieliaev, and the whole household, then listen to me. I will sing you a song. I have a very poor voice, but you are not particular.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*surprised*): A song?

SHPIGELSKI: Yes. Listen. Here is the first verse?

Grandmother had a little grey goat,
Grandmother had a little grey goat;
Just so, just so, a little grey goat,
Just so, just so, a little grey goat.

Second verse:

The little grey goat went to walk in the woods,
The little grey goat went to walk in the woods;
Just so, just so, went to walk in the woods,
Just so, just so, went to walk in the woods.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA: But, truly, I don't understand it.

SHPIGELSKI: Listen to the third verse, then:

Hungry grey wolves ate the little grey goat,
Hungry grey wolves ate the little grey goat;
Just so, just so, ate the little grey goat,
Just so, just so, ate the little grey goat.

Well, now we can go. By the way, I want to have a talk with Natalia Petrovna. I am sure she won't snap at me. If I am not mistaken, she still needs me. Come on. (*Both go into the garden.*)

KATIA (*carefully coming out from behind the column*): I thought they would never go away! Oh, that mad doctor! Talked and talked and talked, and said nothing. And how queerly he sang! I am afraid that I have missed Aleksiei Nikolaich. I don't see why they wanted to come here. (*Goes up to the window*) Lizaveta Bogdanovna will make a nice doctor's wife! (*Laughing.*) I can just see her! I don't envy her anyway. (*Looking out of the window.*) How nice the grass looks; how fresh it smells! I think it must be the rock cherries that I smell. Oh; here he is coming (*After a moment*) Aleksiei Nikolaich! Aleksiei Nikolaich!

BIELIAEV (*from behind the scenes*): Who is calling me? Oh, it is you, Katia? (*Appears at the window.*) What do you want?

KATIA: Come in here, I want to tell you something!

BIELIAEV: All right. (*Goes away from the window, and after a minute enters through the door.*) Here I am.

KATIA: Didn't you get wet?

BIELIAEV: No. I have been in the hot-house, with Potap. What is he to you—an uncle, or what?

KATIA: Yes, he is my uncle.

BIELIAEV: How pretty you look to-day! (*KATIA smiles and drops her eyes. He reaches into his pocket and takes out a peach.*) Do you want it?

KATIA (*refusing it*): Thank you. Eat it yourself.

BIELIAEV: Did I refuse you, yesterday, when you brought the raspberries to me? Take it. I picked it for you, truly.

KATIA (*taking it*): Well, thank you.

BIELIAEV: That's it. What did you want to tell me?

KATIA : Miss—Miss Viera Aleksandrovna asked me—she wants to see you.

BIELIAEV : Oh ! Well, I will go to see her.

KATIA : No, no ! She is coming here. She wants to talk to you.

BIELIAEV (*somewhat amazed*) : She is coming here ?

KATIA : Yes. She wants to come here. You know, no one ever comes here. She won't be disturbed. (*Sighs.*) Aleksiei Nikolaich ! She loves you very much. She is such a good soul. Shall I go after her ? Will you wait a little while ?

BIELIAEV : Surely, surely.

KATIA : Right away. (*Starts to go, and stops.*) Aleksiei Nikolaich ! Is it true that you are going to leave us ?

BIELIAEV : I ? No. Who told you that ?

KATIA : So you are not going away ? Thank God ! (*Somewhat confusedly*) I will return right away. (*Goes out the door which leads to the house.*)
BIELIAEV remains still for a short while.)

BIELIAEV : What wonders, what wonders I am living through ! I confess, I had not expected this. Viera loves me, and Natalia Petrovna knows it. Viera herself confessed to her. Wonders ! Viera, such a dear, kind little girl ! No. . . . What does this note mean ? (*Takes a small piece of paper from his pocket.*) From Natalia Petrovna, in pencil—"Don't go away. Don't decide upon anything, until we have had another talk." What does she want to talk to me about ? (*Short pause.*) What foolish thoughts enter my head ! I confess, all this has upset me. Had anyone told me, a month ago, that I—I . . . I haven't come to myself, since the conversation with Natalia Petrovna. Why does my heart beat so ? And now, Viera wants to see me. What shall I tell her ? At least, I know what it is about.

. . . Perhaps Natalia Petrovna is mad at me—but why? (*Reads the note again.*) All this is so strange, so strange, so very strange! (*The door opens quietly. He hides the note. VIERA and KATIA appear in the doorway. He goes up to them. VIERA is very pale. She neither lifts her eyes, nor moves from her place.*)

KATIA: Don't be afraid, miss. Go up to him. I'll watch. Don't be afraid. (*To BIELIAEV*) Oh, Aleksiei Nikolaich! (*She shuts the window, goes into the garden and closes the door after her.*)

BIELIAEV: Viera Aleksandrovna! You wanted to see me? Come up here, and let's sit down here. (*Takes her by the hand, and leads her to the bench. VIERA sits down.*) So. (*Looking at her in astonishment*) Have you been crying?

VIERA (*not lifting her eyes*): That's nothing. I have come to ask your pardon, Aleksiei Nikolaich.

BIELIAEV: For what?

VIERA: I heard that you had had an unpleasant conversation with Natalia Petrovna. . . . Are you going away? . . . You are dismissed.

BIELIAEV: Who told you that?

VIERA: Natalia Petrovna herself. I met her after your conversation with her. She told me that you didn't want to remain here. But I think you were dismissed.

BIELIAEV: Tell me, does everybody in the house know it?

VIERA: No, only Katia. I had to tell her. I wanted to have a talk with you, and to ask you to forgive me. Imagine how hard it is for me now! I am the cause of it all, Aleksiei Nikolaich. I alone am responsible.

BIELIAEV: You, Viera Aleksandrovna?

VIERA: I couldn't expect . . . Natalia Petrovna.

. . . However, I am willing to forgive her. Forgive me, too. This morning, I was a foolish child, not now . . . (*Stops short.*)

BIELIAEV: Nothing has been decided upon, Viera Aleksandrovna. I may remain, yet.

VIERA (*mournfully*): You say that nothing has been decided upon, Aleksiei Nikolaich? No, everything has been decided upon, and it is all over. You are not the same with me now, as you were yesterday, in the garden. (*After a pause.*) Oh, I see. Natalia Petrovna told you everything!

BIELIAEV (*somewhat confused*): Viera Aleksandrovna! . . .

VIERA: Oh, she told you everything. I can see that. She wanted to catch me, yesterday. And I, foolish little thing, threw myself into her net. But she, also, gave herself away—I am not such a baby . . . (*Lowering her voice*) Oh, no!

BIELIAEV: What did you start to say?

VIERA (*looking at him*): Aleksiei Nikolaich! Did you, yourself, really want to leave us?

BIELIAEV: Yes.

VIERA: Why? (*BIELIAEV is silent.*) Don't you want to answer me?

BIELIAEV: Viera Aleksandrovna! You have made no mistake: Natalia Petrovna told me all about it.

VIERA (*in a subdued voice*): What, for instance?

BIELIAEV: Viera Aleksandrovna—truly, it is hard for me—you understand me.

VIERA: Perhaps she told you that I love you?

BIELIAEV (*hesitatingly*): Y-e-s.

VIERA (*quickly*): It isn't true.

BIELIAEV (*agitatedly*): How's that?

VIERA (*covering her face with her hands, and murmuring through her fingers*): I, at least, didn't tell her that? I do not remember . . . (*Lifting her head*) Oh, how meanly she behaved to me! And you—and you wanted to leave on account of that?

BIELIAEV: Viera Aleksandrovna! Judge for yourself——

VIERA (*looking at him*): He doesn't love me. (*Covers her face again.*)

BIELIAEV (*sitting down near her and taking her hand*): Viera Aleksandrovna! Give me your hand. Listen. There ought not to be any misunderstanding between us. I love you, as I do my sister. I love you, because it is impossible not to love you. Pardon me, if—— I have never been in such a position. I do not want to offend you. I am not going to dissemble with you. I know that you like me; in fact, that you have come to love me. But, judge for yourself, what could be the outcome of it? I am twenty years old, and I haven't a copper to my name. Please, don't be mad at me, for truly, I don't know what to say.

VIERA (*taking her hand away from her face, and looking at him*): You are talking as though I had made demands upon you. Why so cruel, why so unkind——(*Stops short.*)

BIELIAEV: Viera Aleksandrovna! I didn't mean to grieve you.

VIERA: I don't blame you, Aleksiei Nikolaich. What are you to blame for? I am the only one to blame, and I am punished for it. I don't even blame her. I know she is a very kind woman, but she can't control herself. She simply let herself go.

BIELIAEV (*doubtfully*): Let herself go?

VIERA (*turning to him*): Natalia Petrovna, Bieliaev !

BIELIAEV : How's that ?

VIERA : She is in love with you.

BIELIAEV : What are you talking about ?

VIERA : I know what I am talking about. This day has aged me considerably. I am no longer a child, believe me. She is jealous of me. (*With an ironical smile*) How does that seem to you ?

BIELIAEV : But it is impossible !

VIERA : Impossible ! What made her want to marry me off to that gentleman—what's his name ?—Bolshintsov ? Why did she send the doctor to me ? Why did she herself try to talk it into me ? Oh, I know only too well what I am talking about. If you could only have seen, Bieliaev, how her face changed, when I told her. . . . Oh, you cannot even imagine, how cunningly, how artfully she got that confession out of me ! Yes, she loves you. That's plain, too plain.

BIELIAEV : Viera Aleksandrovna ! You are mistaken, I assure you.

VIERA : No, I am not mistaken. Believe me, I am not mistaken. If she does not love you, why did she torment me so much ? What have I done to her ? (*Bitterly*) Jealousy justifies everything ! But what's the use of talking about it ? And now, why is she dismissing you ? She thinks that you—that we . . . Oh, she can calm herself. You can remain here. (*Covers her face with her hands.*)

BIELIAEV : She hasn't dismissed me yet, Viera Aleksandrovna. I told you that nothing had been decided upon.

VIERA (*suddenly lifting her head, and looking at him*) : Really and truly ?

BIELIAEV: Yes. But why are you looking at me that way?

VIERA (*as though to herself*): Oh, I understand. . . . Yes, yes. . . . She still hopes. . . .

[*The door into the corridor opens quickly and NATALIA PETROVNA appears. She stops short on seeing VIERA and BIELIAEV.*

BIELIAEV: What are you talking about?

VIERA: Now, everything is clear to me. She bethought herself, and understood that I would not be in her way. And really, how could I? Who am I? Only a foolish little girl, and she . . .

BIELIAEV: Viera Aleksandrovna! How can you think—

VIERA: And, after all, who knows? Perhaps she is right; perhaps you love her.

BIELIAEV: I?

VIERA (*getting up*): Yes, you. Why are you blushing?

BIELIAEV: I, blushing, Viera Aleksandrovna?

VIERA: You love her! Do you love her . . . you do not answer my question?

BIELIAEV: What do you want me to answer, Viera Aleksandrovna? You are so nervous. Quiet yourself, for God's sake!

VIERA (*turning away from him*): Oh, you are acting towards me as towards a child. You don't even consider it worth while to give me a serious answer. You simply want to rid yourself—you're quieting me. (*Starts to go, but stops when she sees NATALIA PETROVNA.*) Natalia Petrovna! (*BIELIAEV looks around quickly.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA (*advancing a few steps*): Yes, it is I. (*She speaks with restraint.*) I have come after you, Viera.

VIERA (*slowly and coldly*): What made you come here? You must have been looking for me.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes, I have been looking for you. You are not careful, Viera. I have told you more than once—— And you, Aleksiei Nikolaich. You have forgotten your promise. You have deceived me.

VIERA: Enough, enough of that, Natalia Petrovna! Stop it. (NATALIA PETROVNA *looks at VIERA in surprise*.) Enough of this talking to me like a child! (*Lowering her voice a little*) From to-day on, I am a woman, a full grown woman, like yourself.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*somewhat confused*): Viera! . . .

VIERA (*barely audibly*): He has not deceived you, and he did not expect to meet me here. He does not love me, and you know it. So you needn't be jealous.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with increasing surprise*): Viera!

VIERA: Believe me, and stop your craftiness. Such deceit will not work any more. I can see it through and through. Believe me. Natalia Petrovna! I am no more the charge, whom you have to care for—(*ironically*)—"as your older sister." (*Goes nearer to her.*) I am your rival.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Viera! You are forgetting yourself——

VIERA: Very likely, but who forced me to it? I don't know where I got the courage to talk to you this way. Perhaps, I talk to you this way because I have lost all hope, or because it has pleased you to keep me under your foot. And you succeeded fully. But listen. I have no intention of playing with you, as you did with me. Know, once and for all (*pointing to BIELIAEV*) I have told him everything.

NATALIA PETROVNA: What could you have told him ?

VIERA (*ironically*): All that I have happened to notice. You hoped to get everything out of me, without betraying yourself; you made a mistake, Natalia Petrovna. You counted too much on your resources. . . .

NATALIA PETROVNA: Viera ! Viera ! Bethink yourself.

VIERA (*in a whisper, and moving closer to her*): Tell me that I have made a mistake; tell me that you don't love him ! Tell me that he loves me ! (NATALIA PETROVNA is silent, in her confusion. VIERA remains for some time immovable, and then suddenly puts her hand on her forehead.) Natalia Petrovna ! Pardon me. I—I don't know what was the matter with me. Pardon me. Be so kind— (*She bursts into tears and quickly goes out through the door leading into the corridor. Short pause.*)

BIELIAEV (*going up to NATALIA PETROVNA*): I can assure you, Natalia Petrovna—

NATALIA PETROVNA (*looking at him without moving, then stretching her hand to him*): Stop, Aleksiei Nikolaich ! Viera was right. It is time, high time for me to stop being crafty. I am guilty before her, and before you. You have a right to despise me. (BIELIAEV makes an involuntary movement.) I have lowered myself in my own eyes. I have only one way out, and that is to try to gain your respect anew, by being frank, very frank with you, no matter what the consequences may be. Moreover, I am seeing you now for the last time; I am talking to you for the last time. (*Looking straight at him*) I love you.

BIELIAEV: You, Natalia Petrovna ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes, I. I love you. Viera has not deceived herself, nor has she deceived you. I began to love you the first day of your

arrival, but I only realised it yesterday. I have no intention of trying to justify my behaviour; it has not been worthy of me. But at least, you can understand it now, and you can forgive me. Yes, I was jealous of Viera. Yes. In my mind, I had her married to Bolshintsov, with the object of keeping her away from you and me. Yes. I made use of my experience, and my position, to get her secret away from her, and what I did not expect, I betrayed myself. I love you, Bieliaev, but you must know, that it is only my pride that is forcing me to tell you that. The farce which we have been playing up to now finally has upset me. You cannot remain here. After what I have told you just now, you wouldn't be comfortable in my presence, anyway, and you will want to leave here as soon as possible. I am convinced of that. It is this conviction which has given me the courage to talk to you. I confess, I don't want you to go away, taking with you unpleasant memories of me. Now, you know it all. I, very likely, have disturbed you. Very likely, if I hadn't interfered, you would have learned to love Viera. I have only one apology to make, Aleksiei Nikolaich, and that is: that it was beyond my control. *(She stops talking for a minute. So far, she has been talking in an even, quiet voice, not looking at BIELIAEV. He is silent. She continues, with some agitation, but still not looking at him.)* You do not answer me? Well, I can see the reason. You have nothing to say. The position of a man who is loved, and does not return it is a very hard one. I thank you for your silence. Believe me, that when I told you I loved you, I was sincere. I didn't stop to think of anything. On the contrary, I wanted to throw off my mask, to which, I can assure you, I am not accustomed. Moreover, what is the use of affectation and craftiness, when all is known? Why dissemble, when there is no one to deceive? All is ended between us. I will not

keep you any longer. You can leave here without saying a word to me; without even bidding me good-bye. I shall not only not consider it impolite, but I shall be very thankful to you. There are instances when politeness is out of place; when it is worse than downright rudeness. It is very evident that we were not meant to know one another. But, I hope at least that I have ceased to be in your eyes that oppressing, masking, and cunning being. Good-bye, for ever! (*BIELIAEV wants to say something, but cannot on account of his agitation.*) You are not going?

BIELIAEV (bows, and starts to go, but after some struggle with himself, he returns): No, I cannot go. (*NATALIA PETROVNA looks at him for the first time.*) I cannot go away like this. Listen, Natalia Petrovna! You told me, just now, that you didn't want me to carry away unpleasant memories of you. But I don't want either that you should think of me as of a man, who—Oh, God! I don't know what to say. Natalia Petrovna! Pardon me. I do not know how to talk to ladies. Until now, I have always known a different class of women. You said that we were not meant to know one another. Just think! How could I, a simple, almost uneducated boy, even think of getting closer to you? Think of who you are and who I am. Think! Could I dare even to imagine. . . . The way you have been brought up—Why am I talking about being brought up! Look at me. This old coat, and your scented clothes! Think of it. Well, yes, I have been afraid of you, and I am afraid of you now. I, without any exaggeration, looked upon you as upon a being much higher, and, after all, you have told me that you love me. You, Natalia Petrovna, love me! I feel that my heart is beating as it has never beaten before, for it is beating, not out of mere amazement, not on account of my flattered egotism;

no, I am not thinking now of myself, but I—I cannot go away now, like this. As you please.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*after a moment's silence, and almost to herself*): What have I done?

BIELIAEV: Natalia Petrovna! For the Lord's sake! Believe me——

NATALIA PETROVNA (*in a changed voice*): Aleksiei Nikolaich! If I did not know you for a respectable man, who could not lie, I could be thinking almost anything. Perhaps, I would repent of my frankness, but I do believe you. I do not want to hide my feelings from you. I am grateful to you for what you have told me just now. I know, now, why we haven't become better acquainted. I know, now, that there is nothing in me that has repulsed you, except my position. (*Stops for a minute.*) It is all for the best, and it is all ended now. But it will be much easier for me to part with you now. Good-bye. (*Starts to go.*)

BIELIAEV (*after a short silence*): Natalia Petrovna! I know that I cannot remain here, but I cannot tell you all that I am living through. You love me! I am almost afraid to repeat those words, for all that is so new to me. It seems to me, that I am seeing you and hearing you for the first time. But I feel one thing: I must go. I feel that I cannot be responsible for anything——

NATALIA PETROVNA (*in a weak voice*): Yes, Bieliaev, you must go. Now, after this explanation, you can go. And is it possible, that, overlooking all that I have done. . . . Oh, believe me, if I could only have suspected that this which you have now told me—this confession—Bieliaev, it would die within me. All I wanted was to stop these misunderstandings. I wanted to confess, to punish myself. I wanted to, at once, tear the last threads. If I could only have imagined. . . . (*Covers her face with her hands.*)

BIELIAEV: I believe you, Natalia Petrovna; I believe you. I, myself, fifteen minutes ago—could I have imagined any such thing? Only to-day, during our last meeting at dinner, for the first time, I began to feel something unusual, something that had never happened before, as though someone's hand oppressed my heart. And my heart got so warm! Before, I felt kind of strange, as though I hadn't loved you. But when you told me to-day, that it seemed to Viera Aleksandrovna . . . (*Stops.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with a forced smile of happiness*): Enough, enough, Bieliev! We mustn't think about this any more. We mustn't forget that we are talking to one another for the last time; that you are going to leave to-morrow.

BIELIAEV: Oh, yes, I shall go to-morrow. I can even go now. This will all pass away. You see, I don't want to exaggerate. I am going, and there the Lord may help me. I shall carry away with me one memory; I shall remember for ever that you love me. But how is it that I haven't known you until now? Well, you are looking at me. Is it possible that I have tried to escape your look? Is it possible that I have ever felt timid in your presence?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with a smile*): You told me just now that you were afraid of me.

BIELIAEV: I? (*After a short silence*) Exactly. I am surprised, myself. And I am talking to you so courageously. I really don't recognise myself.

NATALIA PETROVNA: And you are not deceiving yourself?

BIELIAEV: In what?

NATALIA PETROVNA: In that you . . . (*shuddering.*) Oh, Lord! What am I doing? Listen, Bieliev. Help me. No woman was ever in a similar position. I have no more strength left.

Perhaps it is better this way—to stop it all at once. However, we have at least come to know one another. Give me your hand, and let us say good-bye for ever.

BIELIAEV (*taking her hand*): Natalia Petrovna ! I don't know how to bid you good-bye. My heart is so full. . . . May God give you—— (*He stops and kisses her hand.*) Good-bye. (*He starts to go to the garden door.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA (*looking in his direction*): Bieliev . . . (*BIELIAEV turns around.*)

BIELIAEV: Natalia Petrovna !

NATALIA PETROVNA (*in a weak voice, after a short silence*): Remain !

BIELIAEV: Why ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Stay, and let the Lord judge us. (*She hides her head in her hands.*)

BIELIAEV (*going up to her quickly and stretching out both hands*): Natalia Petrovna . . .

[*At this moment, the door opens, and RAKITIN appears. He looks at them for a minute, then goes up to them.*]

RAKITIN (*loudly*): And they are looking everywhere for you, Natalia Petrovna !

[*NATALIA PETROVNA and BIELIAEV look around.*]

NATALIA PETROVNA (*taking her hands from her face, as though coming to herself*): Oh, is that you, Rakitin ? Who is looking for me ?

[*BIELIAEV, agitated, bows to NATALIA PETROVNA and starts to go.*]

Oh, you are going away, Aleksiei Nikolaich ? Don't forget—you know . . . (*BIELIAEV bows to her again and goes into the garden.*)

RAKITIN: Arkadi is looking for you. I declare, I didn't expect to find you here, but, passing by——

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NATALIA PETROVNA (*with a smile*): You overheard our voices? I met Aleksiei Nikolaich here, and have had a full explanation with him. It is very evident that this is a day for explanations. But now we can go home. (*Starts to go to the door leading to the house.*)

RAKITIN (*somewhat agitated*): May I know the decision?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with assumed surprise*): What decision? I don't understand your question.

RAKITIN (*mournfully, after a long silence*): If that is the case, I understand it all.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well, so be it. Again secret hints! Well, I have had an explanation with him, and now everything is all right. It was all exaggerated nonsense. All that we have talked about is nothing but nonsense. We must forget it now.

RAKITIN: I am not trying to find it out, Natalia Petrovna.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*with forced gaiety*): What was it I wanted to tell you? I don't remember. Well, it doesn't matter. Come on. It's all over; it's all passed now.

RAKITIN (*looking at her fixedly*): Yes, it is all over. How vexed you must feel with yourself! Particularly for your frankness to-day!

NATALIA PETROVNA (*turning away from him*): Rakitin! (*He looks at her again. It is evident that she doesn't know what to say.*) You haven't spoken to Arkadi, yet?

RAKITIN: No, not yet. I haven't had time to prepare anything. You understand that I must invent something?

NATALIA PETROVNA: How unbearable! What do they want of me? They are watching me at

every step. Rakitin ! Truly, I am ashamed before you.

RAKITIN : Oh, Natalia Petrovna, there is no need of apologising. What for ? It is all a matter of course. But how evident it is that Mr. Bieliaev is still a novice ! And why did he run away ? However, in time . . . (*semi-audibly and quickly*)—you'll both learn to dissemble. (*Bitterly.*) Come. (*NATALIA PETROVNA starts to go up to him, but stops. At this moment, ISLAEV's voice is heard in back of the garden door: "He went in here, you say?" ISLAEV and SHPIGELSKI enter.*)

ISLAEV : That's it. Here he is. Bah, bah, bah ! And Natalia Petrovna is here, too. (*Going up to her*) What's this—a continuation of this morning's explanation ? It is very evident that the subject is an important one.

RAKITIN : I just met Natalia Petrovna here.

ISLAEV : Met ? (*Looks around.*) What a meeting-place ! Just think of it !

NATALIA PETROVNA : Well, you came in here too.

ISLAEV : I came in here, because—— (*Stops.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA : You were looking for me ?

ISLAEV (*after a moment's silence*) : Yes, I was looking for you. Wouldn't you like to go home ? Tea is ready. It is growing dark.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*taking his hand*) : Come on.

ISLAEV (*looking around*) : And out of this space here, we could make two fine rooms for the gardeners, or another manor-house. What do you think, Shpigelski ?

SHPIGELSKI : Sure enough.

ISLAEV : Let's go through the garden, Natasha. (*They go out through the garden door.*)

[*During this entire scene, ISLAEV has not looked at RAKITIN. From the doorway, he turns around half-way.*

Well, gentlemen, come on, let's have some tea.
(*Goes out with NATALIA PETROVNA.*)

SHPIGELSKI (*to RAKITIN*): Well, Mikhail Aleksandrych, come on. Give me your arm. It is very evident that we are fated to be in the rear-guard.

RAKITIN (*warmly*): Oh, doctor, let me tell you that you bore me to death.

SHPIGELSKI: I don't bore you any more than I bore myself, Mikhail Aleksandrych, if you want to know the truth. (RAKITIN *smiles involuntarily.*)
Come on, come on.

[*Both go out.*

CURTAIN

ACT V

The same scenery as in Acts One and Three. Morning.

ISLAEV *sits at the table and looks over some papers.*

Suddenly, he gets up.

ISLAEV: No. Positively, I can't do a thing to-day. I feel as though someone had driven a nail into my head. (*Walks around a little.*) I declare, I didn't expect this. I didn't expect to be upset as I am now. What shall I do? That's the problem. (*Thinks for a minute, then shouts*) Matviei!

MATVIEI (*entering*): Yes, sir?

ISLAEV: Call the bailiff. Tell the diggers of the dike to wait a little. Go.

MATVIEI: Yes, sir. (*Goes out.*)

ISLAEV (*going up to the table, and looking over his papers*): Yes, that's the problem.

[ANNA SEMENOVNA *enters and goes up to ISLAEV.*

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Arkasha!

ISLAEV: Oh, is that you, Mamma dear? How's your health?

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*sitting down on the divan*): I am well, thank the Lord. (*Sighing.*) I am well. (*Sighs a little louder.*) Thank the Lord! (*Seeing that ISLAEV doesn't notice her, she sighs still louder, and finishes with a groan.*)

ISLAEV: You are sighing! Something is the matter with you?

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*sighing again, but not quite so loudly*): Oh, Arkasha! As though you don't know why I am sighing!

ISLAEV: What do you want to say?

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*after a short silence*): I am your mother, Arkasha. It is true, you are a man with sense; but still, I am your mother. It is a great word—mother!

ISLAEV: Explain yourself, please.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: You know what I am hinting at, my dear. Your wife, Natasha—surely, she is an excellent woman, and her behaviour until now has been most exemplary—but she is so young, Arkasha! Youth, you know . . .

ISLAEV: I know what you want to say. It seems to you that her relations with Rakitin—

ANNA SEMENOVNA: God forbid! That wasn't what I had in mind.

ISLAEV: You didn't let me finish. It seems to you, that her relations with Rakitin are not very clear. Their secret conversations, her tears—all that seems strange to you.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: But what, Arkasha, has he told you? What were they talking about? He hasn't told me anything.

ISLAEV: Mother, dear! I haven't asked him anything, and, as it seems, he is in no hurry to satisfy my curiosity.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Then what do you intend to do now?

ISLAEV: I, Mamma? Nothing.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Why nothing?

ISLAEV: Because; nothing.

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*getting up*): I declare, it surprises me. Surely, you are master in your own house, and you know better than I do what is good and what is bad. However, think over the consequences—

ISLAEV: Mamma dear! Truly, you are worrying over nothing.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: My dear boy! I am a mother—still, you know best. (*After a moment's silence*) I must tell you, though, that I came in here intending to offer myself as a mediator—

ISLAEV (*quickly*): No, Mamma dear, I must ask

you not to bother yourself on that account. Please.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Just as you like, Arkasha, just as you like. I shall not say another word. I have warned you, and so I have fulfilled my duty. Now, I shall feel as cautious as though my mouth were full of water.

[*Short silence.*]

ISLAEV: Aren't you going out anywhere to-day?

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Only, I must warn you that you are exceedingly trusting, my dear. You judge everybody by yourself. Believe me, true friends are very rare, nowadays.

ISLAEV (*impatiently*): Mamma! . . .

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Well, I shall say no more. I am too old. Possibly, I have outlived my senses. And I was brought up under different rules, too. I have tried to bring you up by the same rules, but . . . Well, go on with your work. I shall not disturb you any more. I am going away. (*Goes to the door and stops.*) Well then—Well, you know best. (*Goes out.*)

ISLAEV (*looking after her*): I can't see why people, who really love you, like to put all their fingers in turn upon your wound. And the most peculiar feature about it is, that they are convinced, both that it is necessary, and that it makes it easier for you. However, I don't blame Mother, for her intentions undoubtedly are the best, the very best. And how can one, with the best of intentions, refrain from giving advice? However, that is not the point. (*Sits down.*) How shall I act? (*Thinks a minute and gets up.*) The more simply, the better. Diplomacy isn't for me. I should be the first one to get tangled up in it. (*Rings. MATVIEI enters.*) Is Mikhail Aleksandrovich home, do you know?

MATVIEI: He is home. I have just seen him in the billiard-room.

ISLAEV: Tell him I would like to have him come in here.

MATVIEI: Yes, sir. (*Goes out.*)

ISLAEV (*acing to and fro*): I am not used to such gossip. I hope that it will not repeat itself again. Though I am quite strong physically, yet I don't think I could bear it very often. (*Puts his hand on his heart.*) Ugh!

[RAKITIN, *confused*, enters from the sitting-room.

RAKITIN: You called me?

ISLAEV: Yes. (*Silence.*) Michel! You are indebted to me, are you not?

RAKITIN: I?

ISLAEV: Yes, you. Have you forgotten your promise? I mean concerning Natalia's tears, and—and everything else, when Mother and I met you—— Do you remember? You told me that there was a secret between you and her, and that you would explain it.

RAKITIN: Did I say secret?

ISLAEV: Yes, that's what you said.

RAKITIN: What secret could there be between us? We were having a talk; that is all.

ISLAEV: About what? And what was she crying about?

RAKITIN: You know, Arkadi, that there are moments in the life of a woman, even the happiest——

ISLAEV: Rakitin! Stop a moment. That's not the way. I don't like to see you in such a position. Your confusion oppresses me, more than yourself. (*Takes him by the hand.*) We are old friends. You have known me from childhood; you know that I can't mask, and you have always been frank with me. Let me ask you one question. I give you my word of honour, that I will not

doubt the veracity of your answer. Do you love my wife?

[RAKITIN *looks at ISLAEV.*

What I mean by that, is—do you love my wife as I do? In short, do you love my wife with such a love that it would be hard to confess it to her husband?

RAKITIN (*after a moment's silence: in a dull voice*): Yes, I love your wife with just such a love.

ISLAEV (*after another silence*): Michel! I thank you for your frankness. You are an honourable man. Well, what is to be done now? Sit down. We'll think the matter over together. (RAKITIN *sits down. ISLAEV paces to and fro.*) I know Natasha, and I know her value. . . . But I know my own price, too. I am not as good a man as you are, Michel! Don't interrupt me, please. I am not as good a man as you are. You are much brighter, better, and more agreeable. I am only a simple man. I think that Natasha does love me, but she has eyes, and, in short, she must like you. Moreover, I noticed long ago your mutual friendship, but I had confidence in both of you, and as long as nothing objectionable was apparent— Oh, I can't express myself. (*Stops pacing.*) But after yesterday's scene, after yesterday's second meeting— Well, I don't know what to do. Had I alone seen those meetings— Well, but there were witnesses to them. Mother saw them and also that rogue, Shpigelski. Well, what do you say, Michel?

RAKITIN: You are quite right, Arkad.

ISLAEV: But that isn't the point. What shall be done? I must tell you, Michel, that, though I am a simple man and though I know that to interfere with another's life isn't right, and though such things do happen, still I know when to insist upon my rights. This, my dear boy, I haven't gained from books, but my own conscience tells it to me. To give full freedom—

Well, I am willing to give freedom, but, I must think over just how to do it, for it is very important.

RAKITIN (*getting up*): I have thought it all over.

ISLAEV: Well?

RAKITIN: I must go away. I must leave here.

ISLAEV (*after a moment's silence*): You think . . . To leave here for good?

RAKITIN: Yes.

ISLAEV (*again pacing the room*): That's rather a hard statement. Still, maybe you are right. It will be hard for us to be without you, and the Lord knows, it may not lead to the desired point. But, you know best. I imagine that you have reached this conclusion only after careful deliberation. Yes, you are dangerous around here. What I said just now, concerning freedom— Well, I don't think I could stand that. Without Natasha, I . . . (*Motions with his hand.*) Within the last few days, my dear boy, I have noticed quite a change in her. She has been living through some deep, continuous agitation which frightens me. I am not mistaken in that, am I?

RAKITIN (*bitterly*): Oh, no, you are not mistaken in that.

ISLAEV: Well, you see . . . Then you are going away?

RAKITIN: Yes.

ISLAEV: Hm! What a sudden upheaval! Why did you want to get so involved, as when Mother and I saw you—

[MATVIEI enters.

MATVIEI: The bailiff has arrived.

ISLAEV: Let him wait.

[MATVIEI goes out.

ISLAEV: Michel ! You are not going away for long. That's nonsense, my dear fellow.

RAKITIN: Surely, I don't know. I think for long.

ISLAEV: I hope you don't think me an Othello ? Really, I don't think that such a conversation between two friends has ever taken place since the world began. I can't part with you just like this.

RAKITIN (*pressing his hand*): You will let me know when I may return ?

ISLAEV: But there is no one here to take your place. Bolshintsov can't do it.

RAKITIN: There are others.

ISLAEV: Who ? Krinitzyn ? That stick ? Bieliaev is quite a nice fellow, but he is not to be compared with you.

RAKITIN (*venomously*): You think so ? You don't know him, Arkadi. You look out for him a little ; that's my advice to you. Do you hear me ? He is a remarkable man.

ISLAEV: Nonsense ! That's why you and Natasha wanted to engage yourselves in his education ? (*Looking at the door*) I think he is coming in here. (*Quickly*) And so, my dear fellow, it is decided upon. You are going away for a short time, some of these days. There is nothing to worry about. We have to prepare Natalia for the event. I'll satisfy Mother. May God bless you. You have lifted a load off my heart. Embrace me, my dear. (*He embraces RAKITIN quickly, then turns around to meet BIELIAEV.*) Oh, is that you ? Well, how are you ?

BIELIAEV: Thank God, Arkadi Sergeiech !

ISLAEV: Where is Kolia ?

BIELIAEV: He is with Herr Schaaf.

ISLAEV: That's good. (*Takes his hat.*) Well, gentlemen, good-bye. I haven't been anywhere

so far, to-day, neither to the dike nor the buildings. I haven't even looked over my correspondence. (*He takes them by their arms.*) Good-bye. Matviei ! Oh, Matviei ! Follow me. (*Goes out.*)

[*RAKITIN remains at the front of the stage, in a thoughtful mood.*]

BIELIAEV (*going up to RAKITIN*): How are you feeling to-day, Mikhail Aleksandrych ?

RAKITIN: Thank you, as usual. How are you ?

BIELIAEV: I am well.

RAKITIN: That's apparent.

BIELIAEV: Why ?

RAKITIN: Oh, your face shows it. Oh, you have a new coat on, eh ? And what do I see—a flower in your buttonhole !

[*BIELIAEV, blushing, pulls it out.*]

Why, why are you pulling it out ? It looks nice. (*After a moment's silence*) By the way, Aleksiei Nikolaich, if you want anything, tell me. I am going to the city to-morrow.

BIELIAEV: To-morrow ?

RAKITIN: Yes. And from there, I may go to Moscow.

BIELIAEV (*surprised*): 'To Moscow ? You told me yesterday that you intended to remain here for a month yet.

RAKITIN: Yes, but business, circumstances have changed my plans.

BIELIAEV: And you are going away for long ?

RAKITIN: I don't know. Possibly for long.

BIELIAEV: May I know, is Natalia Petrovna aware of your intentions ?

RAKITIN: No. Why do you ask me about her ?

BIELIAEV: I ? (*Somewhat confused.*) Just because.

RAKITIN (*after a moment's silence, during which he has looked around*): Aleksiei Nikolaich ! I think that, besides ourselves, there is no one here in the room. And isn't it strange, that we are acting out a comedy for ourselves ? What do you think ?

BIELIAEV: I don't quite understand you, Mikhail Aleksandrych.

RAKITIN: Really ? You really don't understand why I am going away ?

BIELIAEV: No.

RAKITIN: That's strange. However, I am willing to believe you. It is very possible that you don't know the cause. Do you want to ? I will tell you why I am going away.

BIELIAEV: If you please.

RAKITIN: You see, Aleksiei Nikolaich—I rely upon your reticence. You met me here with Arkadi Sergeiech. We have had quite an important conversation, and in consequence of that, I have decided to go away. And do you know why ? I am telling you all this because I consider you an honourable man. It seemed to him that I . . . Well that I loved Natalia Petrovna. What do you think of that ? Isn't it a strange idea ? But I am thankful to him, because he hasn't beat about the bush ; because he hasn't watched us. He has simply come straight to me. Now, tell me, what would you do in my place ? Surely, his suspicions have no ground, but they disturb him. For the peace of his friends, a self-respecting man must be ready and able to make sacrifices ; sacrifice his own pleasures. That's why I am going away. I am quite sure that you will approve of my decision. Am I right ? And isn't it equally true, that you would do the same thing, were you in my place ? You would go away too, wouldn't you ?

BIELIAEV (*after a moment's silence*): Possibly.

RAKITIN: I am very pleased to hear that. Surely, I don't deny the fact that there is a funny side to my going away. I almost consider myself dangerous. But, don't you see, Aleksiei Nikolaich, the honour of a woman is such an important thing. Moreover—surely, I am not talking about Natalia Petrovna—I have known pure women, who, though innocent at heart, and just like children for all their good sense, were capable, more than others, in consequence of this purity and innocence, capable of giving way to sudden passions. And therefore, who can tell but what extra precaution in such cases will never do any harm? The more so, because— By the way, Aleksiei Nikolaich, perhaps you still think that love is the highest ideal on earth?

BIELIAEV (*coldly*): I haven't experienced that yet. But I should think that to be loved by the woman whom one loves would be the greatest happiness.

RAKITIN: May the Lord grant that you retain these convictions long! In my opinion, Aleksiei Nikolaich, every kind of love, happy or unhappy, is real poverty when you devote yourself to it. Wait! You will find out how these pretty little hands can attack; with what kind of devotion they can tear your heart to pieces. Wait! You will learn how much burning hatred there is hidden under the warmest of loves. You will think of me when, like a sick man desirous of health, you will be longing for peace; the most senseless, trivial kind of peace; when you will envy every care-free single man. Wait! You will find out what it means to be under petticoat government; what it means to be enslaved and infected by it. And what a shameful and tiresome slavery it is! And finally, you will find out what little things are bought

for so high a price. But, I don't see any use in telling you all this, for you won't believe me anyway. The point is this, though: it would please me to know that you approve of what I have said. Yes, in such cases, one cannot be too careful.

BIELIAEV (*who hasn't taken his eyes from RAKITIN all through his talk*): I thank you for the lesson, Mikhail Aleksandrych, though I wasn't in need of it.

RAKITIN (*taking him by the hand*): Pardon me, please. I had no intention—I am not the one to give lessons. I merely happened to get into a talkative mood.

BIELIAEV (*ironically*): Without any motive?

RAKITIN (*somewhat confused*): That's just it, without any particular motive. All I wanted—Until now, Aleksiei Nikolaich, you have had no occasion to know women. Women, as a sex, have a moral code of their own.

BIELIAEV: Whom are you talking about?

RAKITIN: No one in particular.

BIELIAEV: Then you must be talking about women in general. Isn't that right?

RAKITIN (*forcing a smile*): Yes, very likely. I really don't know how I happened to fall into this pedantic mood. However, let me, in farewell, give you a last bit of good advice. (*Stops and motions in disgust.*) Ah! What kind of a teacher am I! Pardon my chatter, please.

BIELIAEV: On the contrary, on the contrary . . .

RAKITIN: And so, don't you want something from the city?

BIELIAEV: No, nothing, thank you. I am sorry that you are going away.

RAKITIN: I thank you. . . . Believe me, that I also, feel . . .

[NATALIA PETROVNA and VIERA enter from the office. VIERA looks sad and pale.]

I am very glad to have become acquainted with you. (*Presses BIELIAEV's hand again.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA (*who has been looking all the while at them both, goes up to them*): How do you do, gentlemen?

RAKITIN (*turning around quickly*): How do you do, Natalia Petrovna? How do you do, Viera Aleksandrovna?

[BIELIAEV bows, silently, to NATALIA PETROVNA and VIERA. He feels upset.]

NATALIA PETROVNA (*to RAKITIN*): What are the good things you are doing?

RAKITIN: I am not doing anything.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Viera and I have had a walk in the garden. The air is so nice to-day. The linden trees smell so sweet. We walked under the linden trees. It's quite pleasant to hear the buzzing of the bees overhead. (*To BIELIAEV, timidly*) We were in hopes of meeting you there.

[BIELIAEV does not answer.]

RAKITIN (*to NATALIA PETROVNA*): Oho! You are paying attention to the beauties of Nature, to-day? (*After a moment's silence.*) Aleksiei Nikolaich couldn't go into the garden. . . . He donned a new suit to-day.

BIELIAEV (*quick as a flash*): Surely, it is the only suit I have, and I might tear it in the garden. Is that what you meant to say?

RAKITIN (*blushing*): No, not that, not that at all.

[VIERA silently goes up to the sofa, sits down, and

busies herself with her work. NATALIA PETROVNA forces herself to smile at BIELIAEV. A short, but quite tedious silence ensues.

(venomously) Oh, yes. I forgot to tell you, Natalia Petrovna, I am going away to-day.

NATALIA PETROVNA *(agitatedly)*: You are going away? Where?

RAKITIN: To the city, on business.

NATALIA PETROVNA: I hope not for long?

RAKITIN: It will depend upon how things go.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Try to come back soon. *(To BIELIAEV, not looking at him)* Aleksiei Nikolaich! Were those your drawings that Kolia showed to me? Did you draw them?

BIELIAEV: Yes, I just sketched them. They're not any good.

NATALIA PETROVNA: On the contrary, I think they are very nice. You have quite a lot of talent.

RAKITIN: I see that you are discovering new virtues in Mr. Bieliaev every day.

NATALIA PETROVNA *(coldly)*: Possibly. The better for him. *(To BIELIAEV)* You must have other drawings. Will you show them to me? *(BIELIAEV bows.)*

RAKITIN *(who has been standing as though on pins and needles)*: I think that it is time for me to pack up. Good-bye. *(Goes to the door of the sitting-room.)*

NATALIA PETROVNA *(turning in his direction)*: This isn't the final good-bye, yet?

RAKITIN: Surely.

BIELIAEV *(after some hesitation)*: Mikhail Aleksandrych! Wait, I will go with you. I want to say something to you.

RAKITIN: Ah !

[*Both go into the sitting-room. NATALIA PETROVNA remains in the middle of the stage. After a few moments, she sits down, on the left.*

NATALIA PETROVNA (*after a brief silence*): Viera !

VIERA (*without raising her head*): What do you want ?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Viera ! For Heaven's sake, don't act like that towards me. For Heaven's sake, Viera ! My dear girl . . . (VIERA *does not say anything. NATALIA PETROVNA gets up, crosses the stage, and falls on her knees before VIERA. VIERA tries to raise her, but she turns away, and covers her face with her hands. NATALIA PETROVNA, still on her knees, speaks.*) Viera ! Forgive me. Don't cry, Viera. I am guilty before you ; I am guilty. Can't you forgive me ?

VIERA (*crying*): Get up, get up.

NATALIA PETROVNA: I am not going to get up, Viera, until you have forgiven me. It's hard for you, but you must remember that it isn't any easier for me. Remember, Viera, remember that. Viera ! You know everything. There is only this difference between us—that I have sinned against you.

VIERA (*bitterly*): Is that the only difference ? Oh, no, Natalia Petrovna, there is another difference between us. . . . To-day, you are so kind, so affectionate, so gentle—

NATALIA PETROVNA (*interrupting her*): Because I feel my guilt.

VIERA: Really ? Is that the only reason—

NATALIA PETROVNA (*getting up and sitting down near her*): What other reason could there be ?

VIERA: Natalia Petrovna ! Don't torment me any more ; don't quiz me. . . . (NATALIA PETROVNA *is silent.*)

NATALIA PETROVNA (*sighing*): Viera ! I see you cannot forgive me.

VIERA: You are, to-day, so kind and so gentle, because you feel that you are loved.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*confused*): Viera !

VIERA (*looking at her*): Isn't that true ?

NATALIA PETROVNA (*sadly*): Believe me, we are both equally unfortunate.

VIERA: He loves you !

NATALIA PETROVNA: Viera ! What's the use of tormenting one another ? It's time for us both to come to our senses. Just think what my position is. In what a position we both are ! Just think, on account of my fault, two people know about our secret already. (*Stops.*) Viera ! Instead of tormenting one another with suspicions and tricks, wouldn't it be better for us both to think how to get out of this horrible position ; how to save ourselves ? Or do you think that I can stand this agitation, this nerve-racking ? Or have you forgotten who I am ? But I see you are not listening to me.

VIERA (*looking at the floor thoughtfully*): He loves you.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Viera ! He will go away.

VIERA (*turning round*): Oh, leave me alone.

[NATALIA PETROVNA looks at her hesitatingly. At this moment ISLAEV's voice is heard from the office, "Natasha ! Oh Natasha ! Where are you?"

NATALIA PETROVNA (*getting up quickly and going to the office door*): I am in here. What do you want ?

ISLAEV'S VOICE: Come in here. I want to show you something.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Right away. (*She returns to VIERA and offers her hand. VIERA doesn't reciprocate. NATALIA PETROVNA sighs and goes into the office.*)

VIERA (*alone, after a short silence*): He loves her, and I must stay in her house. Oh, that is too much! (*She covers her face with her hands and remains immovable.*)

[SHPIGELSKI *appears in the sitting-room door. Carefully, on his tip-toes, he goes up to VIERA, who doesn't notice him.*

SHPIGELSKI (*standing in front of VIERA, with his arms folded, and a venomous smile on his face*): Viera Aleksandrovna! Ah, Viera Aleksandrovna!

VIERA (*raising her head*): Who's that? You, doctor?

SHPIGELSKI: What's the matter, my dear miss? Aren't you well?

VIERA: Yes. There is nothing the matter with me.

SHPIGELSKI: Let me feel your pulse. (*Feels her pulse.*) Hm! Beats quite fast. Oh, my dear miss, my dear miss! You don't mind me at all, but I try so very, very hard for you.

VIERA (*looking at him, sternly*): Ignati Ilich . . .

SHPIGELSKI (*quickly*): I am listening, Viera Aleksandrovna. Don't look at me like that. I am listening.

VIERA: Is that Mr. Bolshintsov, your friend, really a good man?

SHPIGELSKI: My friend Bolshintsov? A most excellent, most honest man. He is an example of kindness.

VIERA: He isn't malicious?

SHPIGELSKI: No, he is the kindest man—he isn't really a man; he is a piece of wax. All one has to do is to mould him into the desired shape. He is a perfect lamb.

VIERA: You stand guarantee for him?

SHPIGELSKI (*pressing one hand on his heart, and lifting the other*): As I would for myself.

VIERA: If that is the case, you can tell him that I am willing to marry him.

SHPIGELSKI (*with joyful astonishment*): Is that true?

VIERA: Only tell him as quickly as possible. As quickly as possible.

SHPIGELSKI: To-morrow, if you like. Surely. Hurrah for Viera Aleksandrovna! Great girl! I'll go at once. How glad he will be—— What an unexpected turn of affairs. He's head over heels in love with you, Viera Aleksandrovna.

VIERA (*impatiently*): I don't ask you to tell me that, Ignati Ilich.

SHPIGELSKI: Well, as you like, as you like. Only you will be happy with him. You will thank me for it. (VIERA *makes a gesture of impatience.*) Well, I won't say any more. Then I can go and tell him——

VIERA: You can, you can.

SHPIGELSKI: Very well. I'll go at once. Good-bye. (*Listens.*) By the way, I hear somebody coming. (*He goes to the office door and stops on the threshold. Makes a gesture of doubt.*) Good-bye. (*Goes out.*)

VIERA (*looking after him*): I'll do anything in the world rather than remain here. (*Gets up.*) Yes, I have decided upon that. I will not stay in this house for anything in the world. I cannot bear her benign look. I cannot stand her smile. I cannot see how she can be at ease, how she can enjoy her happiness. She is happy, even though she pretends to be gloomy and morose. Her caresses are unbearable to me.

[BIELIAEV *appears in the sitting-room doorway, looks around, and then goes up to VIERA.*

BIELIAEV (*semi-audibly*): Viera Aleksandrovna ! Are you alone ?

VIERA (*looks around, shudders, and after a moment's silence*): Yes.

BIELIAEV: I am glad that you are alone. In fact, otherwise, I shouldn't have come in. Viera Aleksandrovna ! I have come to say good-bye to you.

VIERA: Good-bye ?

BIELIAEV: Yes. I am going away.

VIERA: You are going away ? And *you* are going away ?

BIELIAEV: Yes, *I* am going away. (*With strong inner agitation.*) You see, Viera Aleksandrovna, it is impossible for me to remain here. My presence here has already created a lot of trouble. In addition to the fact that I have upset your quietude, and the peace of Natalia Petrovna, though I can't account for it, I have also broken up the relationship between old friends. On account of me, Mr. Rakitin is going to leave here. For the same reason, you have quarrelled with your benefactress. It is time to stop all that. After my departure, I hope, everything will become quiet and assume its former aspect. To turn the heads of rich ladies and young girls isn't anything to my taste. Forget about me; and very likely, in time, you will wonder how it could have happened. I don't want to deceive you, Viera Aleksandrovna. I am really afraid to stay here. I can't be responsible for anything. I am not used to such things. I feel awkward; I think that everybody is looking at me. And finally, I should be unable, now, with both of you——

VIERA: Oh, you needn't take me into consideration. I shall not remain here very long.

BIELIAEV: How is that?

VIERA: That's my secret. I am not going to stand in your way, believe me.

BIELIAEV: Well, you see, I must go away. Judge for yourself. It looks as if I had brought the plague into this house. Everybody is running away from here, now. Wouldn't it be better for me to get away, while there is still time? Just now, I had a long talk with Rakitin. You cannot imagine how much bitterness he put into his words. Incidentally, he even joked about my suit. He was right. I must go away. Will you believe me, Viera Aleksandrovna? The time will seem pretty long to me, before I get into the carriage that will take me away from here. The atmosphere here has become stifling to me; I want to get out into the air. I have no more strength left. I feel at once embittered and relieved, like a man who is going on a long journey across the ocean, or somewhere. He hates to part with his friends and yet, the sea is so alluring, the air blows in his face so freshly, that involuntarily, his blood begins to circulate freely, in spite of the fact that his heart is leaden. Yes, I am positively going to leave. I shall return to Moscow, among my colleagues, and get to work.

VIERA: Then you love her, Aleksiei Nikolaich? You love her, and yet you are going away.

BIELIAEV: Stop that, Viera Aleksandrovna! That doesn't do any good. Don't you see that everything is over? Everything flashed up and then went out, like a spark. Let's part friends. It is time I have come to my senses. Be well, and be happy. Some time we may meet again. I shall never forget you, Viera Aleksandrovna. I like you very much, believe me. (*Pressing her hands.*) Take this note for me to Natalia Petrovna.

VIERA (*looking at him confusedly*): A note?

BIELIAEV: Yes. I can't say good-bye to her.

VIERA: Are you going right now?

BIELIAEV: Right now. I haven't said a word about it to anybody except Mikhail Aleksandrych. He approves of it. I am going to walk from here to Petrovski. There I will wait for Mikhail Aleksandrych and we'll go to the city together. From the city, I will write. My things will be sent. You see, everything is packed. You can read the note, if you like. There are only two words there.

VIERA (*accepting the note from him*): And you are really going away?

BIELIAEV: Yes, yes. Give her this note and tell her— No, don't tell her anything. What's the use? (*Listens.*) I hear somebody coming. Good-bye. (*He runs to the door, stops a moment, then hurries out.*)

[VIERA remains with the note in her hand.

NATALIA PETROVNA enters from the reception-room.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*going up to VIERA*): Viera dear! (*Looks at her and stops.*) What is the matter with you? (*VIERA silently hands her the note.*) A note? From whom?

VIERA (*semi-audibly*): Read it.

NATALIA PETROVNA: You scare me. (*Reads the note to herself, and suddenly puts both hands over her face, and falls into a chair. Long silence.*)

VIERA (*going up to her*): Natalia Petrovna!

NATALIA PETROVNA (*not taking her hands from her face*): He is going away! He didn't even want to say good-bye to me! You, at least have had a good-bye from him.

VIERA (*gloomily*): He does not love me.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*taking her hands from her face, and getting up*): He has no right to leave that way. I want . . . He can't do that. Who permitted him to end everything so foolishly? That's despicable. I . . . how does he know that I would never have decided. . . . (*Dropping into the chair again*) Oh, Lord, oh, Lord!

VIERA: Natalia Petrovna! You yourself told me just now that he must go away. Recollect.

NATALIA PETROVNA: You are all right now. He is going away. Now you and I are equal—(*Her voice breaks.*)

VIERA: Natalia Petrovna! You told me just now—here are your own words: "Instead of tormenting one another, wouldn't it be better for us to think how to get out of this position? How to save ourselves?" We are saved now.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*turning away from her, almost with hatred*): Ugh!

VIERA: I understand you, Natalia Petrovna. Don't worry about that. I am not going to oppress you long with my presence. We cannot live together.

NATALIA PETROVNA (*trying to reach her hand to her, but letting it drop in her lap*): Why do you talk that way, Viera dear? Is it possible that you, too, intend to leave me? Yes, you are right; we are saved now. Everything is over; everything will be as before.

VIERA (*coldly*): Don't worry, Natalia Petrovna. (*Looks at her silently.*)

[ISLAEV comes in from the office.

ISLAEV (*having looked at NATALIA PETROVNA for some time, semi-audibly to VIERA*): Does she know that he is going away?

VIERA (*hesitatingly*): Y-e-s, she knows.

ISLAEV (*to himself*): Why is he going so soon? (*Aloud*) Natasha! (*Takes her hand. She raises her head.*) It is I, Natasha. (*She tries to smile.*) Are you ill, my dear? I should advise you to lie down for a little while. You——

NATALIA PETROVNA: I am all right, Arkadi. It isn't anything.

ISLAEV: But you look pale. Truly, listen to me. Lie down and rest for a while.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Well, perhaps it would be best. (*She tries to get up but cannot.*)

ISLAEV (*helping her*): You see. (*She leans on his arm.*) If you want me to, I will escort you.

NATALIA PETROVNA: Oh, I am not as weak as all that. Come on, Viera.

[*They start for the office. RAKITIN comes in from the sitting-room. NATALIA PETROVNA stops.*]

RAKITIN: Natalia Petrovna! I have come——

ISLAEV (*interrupting him*): Oh, Michel! Come here. (*Takes him to one side, and semi-audibly, in a grieved voice, speaks.*) Why did you tell her everything just now? I begged you not to. What was the hurry? I found her here in such a nervous state!

RAKITIN (*doubtfully*): I don't understand you.

ISLAEV: You have told Natasha that you are going away!

RAKITIN: And you imagine that that is what has made her nervous?

ISLAEV: Ssh! She is looking at us. (*Aloud*) Aren't you going to your room, Natasha?

NATALIA PETROVNA: Yes, I am going.

RAKITIN: Good-bye, Natalia Petrovna.

[NATALIA PETROVNA *takes hold of the door-knob, but doesn't say anything.*

ISLAEV (*placing his hand on RAKITIN's shoulder*): Do you know, Natasha, that this is one of the best men——

NATALIA PETROVNA (*in a sudden outbreak*): Yes, I know he is an excellent man; we are all excellent people—all of us, all of us. And yet—— (*She covers her face with her hands suddenly, pushes the door open with her knee, and goes out quickly.*)

[VIERA *follows her. ISLAEV sits down at the table, and puts his head in his hands and remains silent.*

RAKITIN (*looks at him for some time, shrugs his shoulders, smiles bitterly, and says*): What a peculiar situation I am in! It's great, I must say. It is even refreshing. What a parting, after a four years' love affair! It is great, it's great, it's the desert of a babbler. Thank the Lord that everything is for the best. It is high time to cut out this sickly relationship. (*Aloud to ISLAEV*) Well, Arkadi, good-bye.

ISLAEV (*raises his head. Tears roll down his cheeks*): Good-bye, my dear fellow. She isn't—— It isn't so easy for her. I didn't expect this, my boy. It's like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. Well, it will all pass away. Well, thank you, thank you. You are a real friend.

RAKITIN (*semi-audibly*): That's too much. (*Abruptly*) Good-bye. (*Starts to go into the sitting-room. Runs into SHPIGELSKI.*)

SHPIGELSKI: What's the matter? I have been told that Natalia Petrovna is not feeling well.

ISLAEV (*getting up*): Who told you?

SHPIGELSKI: The maid.

ISLAEV: No, it is nothing, doctor. I think it is best to leave Natasha alone now.

SHPIGELSKI: Very well. (*To RAKITIN*) I hear that you are going to town?

RAKITIN: Yes, on business.

SHPIGELSKI: Oh, yes, on business.

[*At this moment, ANNA SEMENOVNA, LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA, KOLIA, and SCHAAF come in from the reception-room.*]

ANNA SEMENOVNA: What's the matter, what's the matter with Natasha?

KOLIA: What's the matter with Mamma, what's the matter with her?

ISLAEV: There is nothing the matter with her. I saw her just a minute ago. What's the matter with you people?

ANNA SEMENOVNA: But, Arkasha, we were told that Natasha didn't feel well.

ISLAEV: And you believed it without cause?

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Then why are you so excited, Arkasha? Our feelings are understood.

ISLAEV: Sure, sure they are.

RAKITIN: Well, I must go.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Are you going to leave us?

RAKITIN: Yes, I am going away.

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*to herself*): Ah, now I understand.

KOLIA (*to ISLAEV*): Papa dear!

ISLAEV: What do you want?

KOLIA: Why has Aleksiei Nikolaich gone away?

ISLAEV: Where has he gone?

KOLIA: I don't know. He kissed me, put on his cap, and went away. And now, it is time for my lesson in Russian.

ISLAEV: He will surely come back soon. If not, we can send somebody to call him.

RAKITIN (*semi-audibly, to ISLAEV*): Don't send anybody after him. He will not return.

[ANNA SEMENOVNA *tries to listen*. SHPIGELSKI *is murmuring something to* LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA.

ISLAEV: What does it mean?

RAKITIN: He has gone away.

ISLAEV: Gone away where?

RAKITIN: To Moscow.

ISLAEV: To Moscow! What on earth is the matter with you? Have you all lost your heads, or what?

RAKITIN (*in a very low voice*): Don't say anything. Viera is in love with him. And so he, like an honest man, decided to keep away. (*ISLAEV spreads out his hands and drops into a chair.*) Now you understand why he has gone?

ISLAEV (*jumping up from the chair*): I? I don't understand a thing. My head is simply swimming. What is there to understand? You are all running away somewhere, like a lot of partridges. And all because you are honest people; and you are all running at once, on the same day!

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*pushing him to one side*): What's the matter? You say Mr. Bieliaev——

ISLAEV (*shouting nervously*): Nothing, Mother, nothing. Mr. Schaaf! Take Kolia and give him a lesson, instead of Bieliaev. Please take him away.

SCHAAF: Yes. mein Herr. (*Takes KOLIA by the hand.*)

KOLIA: But, Papa——

ISLAEV (*shouting*): Go, go!

[SCHAAF *takes him away*.

And you, Rakitin, I, myself, will escort. I will order horses saddled and will wait for you at the dike. And you, Mother dear, in the

meantime, don't disturb Natasha. You too, doctor. Leave her alone. (*Shouts*) Matvici ! Matviei ! (*Goes out quickly.*)

[ANNA SEMENOVNA *sadly but proudly sits down.*
LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA *gets in back of her.*

ANNA SEMENOVNA *looks at the sky, as if she wants to rid herself of the things going on around her.*

SHPIGELSKI (*smilingly, to RAKITIN*): Well, Mikhail Aleksandrych, don't you want me to take you up to the highway, in my new troika ?

RAKITIN: Have you got the horses already ?

SHPIGELSKI (*modestly*): I have had a talk with Viera Aleksandrovna. . . . Would you like to have me ?

RAKITIN: If you like. (*Bows to ANNA SEMENOVNA.*) Anna Semenovna, I have the honour—

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*not getting up from her place: majestically*): Good-bye, Mikhail Aleksandrovich. I wish you a pleasant journey.

RAKITIN: I thank you kindly. Lizaveta Bogdanovna ! (*Bows to her.*)

[*She bows in return.* RAKITIN *goes out to the sitting-room.*

SHPIGELSKI (*going up to ANNA SEMENOVNA*): Good-bye, madam.

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*a little less majestically: nevertheless, austere*): Oh, and you, too, are going away, doctor ?

SHPIGELSKI: Yes. Sick people, you know, are waiting for me. Then, you see, my presence isn't wanted here. (*He bows: nods to LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA, who answers with a smile.*) Good-bye. (*Goes out after RAKITIN.*)

ANNA SEMENOVNA (*watches him go out: folds her hands: turns slowly to LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA*): What do you think about all this, my dear ?
Hm ?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*sighing*): I don't know what to tell you, Anna Semenovna.

ANNA SEMENOVNA: Have you heard that Bieliaev has gone, too?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA (*sighing again*): Oh, Anna Semenovna! It is very possible that I shall have to leave here soon. I will have to go away. (ANNA SEMENOVNA *looks at her in nervous surprise*. LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA *stands in front of her, but does not look at her*.)

CURTAIN

JUDGMENT DAY

Elmer Rice

JUDGMENT DAY

*A Melodrama
in Three Acts*

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ACTION AND SCENE

The action is laid in a capital of South-eastern Europe. The scene represents a room in the Palace of Justice.

ACT I

The first day of the trial.

ACT II

SCENE I: Several days later.

SCENE II: Two days later.

ACT III

SCENE I: Several days later: late afternoon.

SCENE II: An hour later.

SETTING AND BACKGROUND

A COURT of justice in a capital city of a country in South-eastern Europe. It is a distinctly old-world room in an eighteenth-century palace, spacious, ornate, and semi-circular or elliptical in shape. The general tone is baroque, with here and there a touch that is clearly Slavic or near-Eastern. Downstage, in either side wall, at the stage level are double swinging doors, leading at the left to a private ante-room and at the right to the general entrance-room. The doors are covered for two thirds of their height with leather or green baize; above this is a circular pane of opaque glass. The room rises, in three broad steps or platforms, to a central dais which dominates the room and accommodates the judges' table and the five ornate armchairs in which the judges sit. Immediately below the judges' table are the desks of the court reporter and the court clerk. There is no jury. Adjoining the dais, at the right, is the tribune, the witnesses being required to stand while testifying. On either side of the stage, rising in tiers from the stage level to the wall, are the seats for the attorneys, the prisoners and their guards, the witnesses and the spectators. The lawyers and their assistants sit at the stage level facing each other: the prosecution at the right and the defence at the left—the other characters ranged behind them. Upstage, immediately to the right and left of the dais and between it and the banks of chairs, are large French windows, heavily curtained, which give access to balconies overlooking a principal street or square. At the right, on the upper level of the room and downstage of the windows, a door has been cut in the wall. This leads to the judges' consultation room.

On the wall, behind the dais, is a huge crucifix. Against the dark polished wood of the eight-pointed Greek cross, gleams an ivory Christ.

Beneath the crucifix are crossed a great battle-axe and a naked sword. The sword and battle-axe are the national emblem, which is repeated here and there about the room: in stucco above the doors, in embroidery upon the window curtains and the green velvet covering on the judges' table.

In the official dress of all the characters there is a tendency toward over-adornment. The judges wear voluminous green silk robes and green velvet skull caps; the lawyers black robes, faced with green; the clerks, guards and policemen, rather elaborate uniforms; and the witnesses, who are army officers, are well supplied with braid and decorations. A priest dresses in the manner of the Orthodox Church, with long robes, a beard and flowing hair. All the other characters are distinctly European in appearance.

ACT I

The High Court of Justice is in session. On the dais are the five judges: VLORA in the middle, with TSANKOV and STURDZA at his right, and SLATARSKI and MURUSI at his left. At the right side of the court-room are WOLFGANG BATHORY, the prosecutor, and his assistants, MALINOV and SUTZU. At the left side are the defendants and their counsel: in the first row, STAMBULOV, MENSCH and BUSHATI; in the second row, GEORGE KHITOV and LYDIA KUMAN, with a guard between them; in the third row, KURT SCHNEIDER, between two guards. A guard is posted at each of the entrance doors. The remaining chairs are occupied by witnesses and spectators.

At the rise of the curtain, a violent altercation is in progress. GEORGE is on his feet, shouting. His attorney, STAMBULOV, has risen and is trying to persuade him to sit down. The guards to his right and immediately behind him—SRASHIMIR and GHEREA—are on their feet also, urging GEORGE to desist. JUDGE VLORA is standing, pounding his table-bell incessantly and ordering GEORGE to be quiet. Across the room, the PROSECUTOR is demanding that GEORGE be silenced. Everyone else—judges, clerks, attorneys, spectators—watches the scene with a varying degree of interest and excitement. All but SCHNEIDER, who sits impassive throughout, with arms folded and head lowered, apparently oblivious to what is happening.

GEORGE: I demand to be heard ! I demand to be heard ! I insist upon being heard ! It is my right and I demand it ! If it is denied me, I will make myself heard, nevertheless. You cannot silence me ! You cannot silence me, do you hear ? I refuse to be silenced.

STAMBULOV (*simultaneously*): Quiet, Khitov ! In God's name be quiet. Sit down, I beg of you. This accomplishes nothing—nothing I tell you. You are only injuring yourself, that's all. Come on, now, sit down like a reasonable fellow. I implore you to be guided by my advice.

SRAZHIMIR (*simultaneously*): Keep quiet, do you hear? Keep quiet and sit down. Stop it!

GHEREA (*simultaneously*): Come on, sit down, now. Stop it now and sit down. You're making a disturbance.

THE PROSECUTOR (*simultaneously*): This is intolerable! I demand that he be removed! It is an insult to the court!

JUDGE VLORA (*simultaneously; striking his bell*): I order you to be seated! We cannot tolerate such behaviour here, do you understand? If you do not stop these tactics at once, I shall have you removed from the court-room. Make him sit down!

[*But scarcely a word that anyone says can be distinguished above the uproar. At length, JUDGE VLORA by his gestures indicates to the guards that they are to use force. They push GEORGE into his seat, despite his struggles.*]

GEORGE (*panting for breath*): Do not think you have silenced me! Only a muzzle can silence me. Or one of Rakovski's rubber clubs.

[*He stops breathless.*]

THE PROSECUTOR (*shouting*): Your Lordships, this is an outrage! I demand that this fellow be disciplined.

[*At the same time, JUDGE SLATARSKI engages in a whispered conversation with JUDGE VLORA, who has resumed his seat. STAMBULOV expostulates in whispers with GEORGE.*]

JUDGE VLORA (*to the PROSECUTOR*): One moment, if you please.

[*He engages the other judges in a hasty, whispered consultation. It is evident that there is some difference of opinion among them. Finally, JUDGE VLORA reaches a decision and strikes his bell. The spectators gradually become quiet.*]

(*To GEORGE*): Khitov, if you wish to make a statement, the Court will hear you.

[GEORGE *rises*.

THE PROSECUTOR: Your Lordship, I protest against this——

[JUDGE VLORA *strikes his bell*. The PROSECUTOR *subsides*.

JUDGE VLORA (*to GEORGE*): But remember that you must behave with decorum. We shall insist that you conduct yourself in an orderly and respectful manner.

GEORGE: I have no wish to behave otherwise, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: Proceed.

GEORGE: Your Honourable Lordships, I ask once more that this entire proceeding be dismissed.

JUDGE VLORA: That is entirely out of the question. You are charged with a crime of the utmost gravity. It is the duty of this High Court of Justice to determine your guilt or innocence, after we have heard the evidence.

GEORGE: There is no evidence! There is nothing but——

JUDGE VLORA (*sharply*): Enough of that! Have you anything else to say?

GEORGE: Yes, Your Lordship. I object to the constitution of the Court.

JUDGE VLORA: That also is inadmissible. Our procedure does not permit accused persons to choose their own judges.

GEORGE: An accused man has the right to be tried by judges who are unbiased.

JUDGE VLORA: Do you dare to challenge the integrity of this Court? Take care what you say, Khitov.

GEORGE: I object to Dr. Panayot Tsankov as a member of the Court.

JUDGE TSANKOV (*heatedly*): I refuse to permit——

JUDGE VLORA (*holding up his hand*): Please—— !
(*To GEORGE*) Dr. Tsankov has been appointed to the High Court of Justice by the Supreme Council. What is your reason for objecting to him ?

JUDGE TSANKOV: No, I cannot allow this !

JUDGE VLORA: Let him speak.

GEORGE: Isn't it enough that it was he who condemned Alexander Kuman ?

JUDGE VLORA: There is no connection between this trial and the trial of Alexander Kuman.

GEORGE: Excuse me, Your Lordship. The same forces that have destroyed Alexander Kuman are seeking to destroy me. That is why Dr. Tsankov has been appointed. He is a tool of the National Party. He is a hangman, not a judge !

[*There is a murmur of shocked surprise.*]

JUDGE TSANKOV (*rising*): This is—— ! Remove him !

THE PROSECUTOR (*simultaneously*): Your Lordships, how much more of this——

JUDGE VLORA (*to GEORGE*): This is insufferable ! Either retract what you have said or I shall order your removal.

GEORGE: I've spoken the truth. I shan't retract.

JUDGE VLORA: Remove him, then !

[*The two guards, SRAZHIMIR and GHEREA, drag*

GEORGE *from his seat and take him off, at the left, struggling.*]

GEORGE (*as the GUARDS drag him off ; shouting*): Bloody Tsankov ! That's what the people call him. Tsankov the hangman ! He's an assassin, not a judge !

[*The GUARDS succeed in getting him through the doors, at last.*]

STAMBULOV (*rising*): Your Lordships——

[*The JUDGES are whispering excitedly among themselves and pay no attention to him.*]

If your Lordships please——

JUDGE VLORA: Do you wish to make a statement, Dr. Stambulov? I must warn you that we cannot listen to any more such objections.

STAMBULOV: No, no, Your Lordship. On the contrary. If I may be permitted to say so, the eminence and integrity of the members of this tribunal are beyond challenge. I wish only to ask Your Lordships to overlook this ill-advised outburst of Khitov's and——

LYDIA (*scornfully*): What! You apologise for him?

STAMBULOV: If you please——

LYDIA: If Your Lordship will permit me——

JUDGE VLORA: Very well, Mine Kuman. But remember, there must be no more——

LYDIA: Yes, I understand. We cannot choose our own judges, I understand that. But, at least, we should have the right to choose our own counsel.

JUDGE VLORA: You object to Dr. Stambulov? He is one of the ablest and most distinguished of our jurists.

STAMBULOV: Thank you, Your Lordship.

LYDIA: I do not deny that. I simply say that he is not of our own choosing.

JUDGE MURUSI: You were given an opportunity to choose your own counsel, but no one would undertake to defend you.

LYDIA: There are reasons for that, too, Your Lordship.

JUDGE MURUSI: Oh, yes, reasons! There are reasons for everything.

[He looks around for approval. Several people laugh.]

The guard, GHEREA, returns and resumes his place beside SCHNEIDER.

LYDIA: We have presented a petition to Your Lordships——

JUDGE VLORA: Yes, I was coming to that. I have it here, before me. You ask that your brother be allowed——

LYDIA: Yes, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: Is he here?

CONRAD (*rising*): Yes, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: Come forward.

[CONRAD *complies*.

JUDGE VLORA: Your name is——?

CONRAD: Conrad Noli.

JUDGE VLORA: You are the brother of Lydia Kuman?

CONRAD: Yes, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: Where do you live?

CONRAD: In Springfield, Illinois.

JUDGE VLORA: Is that in America?

CONRAD: Yes, Your Lordship.

JUDGE STURDZA: North or South America?

CONRAD: North America. In the United States, Your Lordship.

JUDGE STURDZA: You should be more specific in your answers.

CONRAD: I ask Your Lordship's pardon.

JUDGE VLORA: Where were you born?

CONRAD: At Draskovic, in the Province of Ilyenov.

JUDGE MURUSI: Yes, yes. We all know where Draskovic is.

[*The spectators laugh.*

JUDGE VLORA: How long have you lived in America?

CONRAD: Twelve years, Your Lordship. I went with my parents when I was sixteen years old.

JUDGE VLORA: Are you a citizen of the United States?

CONRAD (*producing a passport*): Yes, Your Lordship.

JUDGE TSANKOV: You have disowned your fatherland, is that it?

CONRAD: Not disowned it. But in order to become a lawyer in the United States——

JUDGE VLORA: You are a lawyer?

CONRAD: Yes, Your Lordship. A graduate of the University of Illinois Law School and a member of the Illinois Bar.

JUDGE STURDZA: Do they hang people there from the limbs of trees as they do in the streets of New York?

CONRAD: Not in New York, Your Lordship. It's only in——

JUDGE STURDZA: Don't contradict. I have seen photographs.

JUDGE VLORA: Have you come here at the request of your sister?

CONRAD: No, Your Lordship, I——

LYDIA: We have not been permitted to communicate with anyone.

JUDGE VLORA: Please be good enough not to interrupt.

CONRAD: Two weeks ago, I read in the *Chicago Tribune* that she had been arrested and was to be put on trial for her life. I came here as quickly as I could. I arrived last night.

JUDGE MURUSI: Did you think we had no lawyers here?

[*Laughter.*]

CONRAD: No, Your Lordship. I am well aware that you have many lawyers who are far more able than I am. I came because I wanted to be near my sister.

JUDGE VLORA: And you wish to associate yourself with her defence?

CONRAD: Yes, if Your Lordships will permit it.

JUDGE VLORA: Dr. Stambulov, do you object?

STAMBULOV: On the contrary, Your Lordship. I welcome anyone who is willing to share with me this very grave responsibility.

THE PROSECUTOR: Your Lordship, I object.

JUDGE VLORA: For what reason, Dr. Bathory?

THE PROSECUTOR: This man is a foreigner, an interloper. He has no standing here and no right to be heard.

JUDGE VLORA: We have already discussed this matter very carefully among ourselves, Dr. Bathory, and have decided to permit M. Noli to associate himself with the defence. It is our intention to give the defendants every opportunity to establish their innocence. There must be no suspicion of unfairness or prejudice.

CONRAD: Thank you, Your Lordship.

JUDGE TSANKOV: You say you read of this case in some American newspaper?

CONRAD: Yes, Your Lordship. This trial is receiving much attention in the American Press.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: We are aware of that.

JUDGE TSANKOV: We have had enough of foreign interference in our affairs. Are you a member of the Republican Party or any of these other radical parties?

CONRAD: No, Your Lordship. I am not a member of any political party. I assure you I have no political interest—

JUDGE TSANKOV: See that you do not forget that we have the good fortune here to be living in a totalitarian state, under the inspired guidance of our glorious Leader, Grigori Vesnic.

[The GUARDS come to attention and give the national salute, which consists in extending the right arm full length. Applause and cries of "Bravo."]

JUDGE VLORA: You must confine yourself to the question of whether the defendants are guilty or innocent of the crime with which they are charged.

CONRAD: I understand, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: Very well, that's all.

CONRAD: I thank Your Lordships for granting my petition.

[He is about to take a seat beside STAMBULOV, whose clerk, BUSHATI, rises to make room for him.]

THE PROSECUTOR: I must warn this gentleman that he undertakes the defence of these assassins at his own risk. Our people resent the meddling of foreigners. The National Government will naturally afford its enlightened protection to this gentleman, but it cannot hold itself responsible for spontaneous manifestations of popular wrath.

LYDIA: If they dare to harm him——

CONRAD (*motioning her to silence: to BATHORY*): I am willing to take my chances, Dr. Bathory. I had the honour to be received by the American Minister, this morning, and he assured me that, as an American citizen, I am under the protection of my country's flag. So with two great countries offering me their protection, I feel that I really have nothing to fear.

JUDGE MURUSI: You will be safer here than in the streets of Chicago.

[He looks about for approval. Several laugh.]

CONRAD takes his seat beside STAMBULOV.

STAMBULOV (*rising*): Your Lordships——

JUDGE VLORA: Well?

STAMBULOV: We ask that George Khitov be re-admitted; he has a right to hear the testimony against him.

THE PROSECUTOR: An assassin has no rights.

CONRAD: In America, an accused person is considered innocent until he is proven guilty.

JUDGE TSANKOV: We are not interested in the sentimentalities of the democratic philosophy.

THE PROSECUTOR: It is not news to us that Americans do not understand the art of government.

[Murmurs of approval.]

JUDGE VLORA: We cannot allow the orderly procedure of the court to be disturbed——

STAMBULOV: Your Lordship, if you will permit him to be re-admitted, we shall undertake that he does not——

JUDGE VLORA: Very well, upon that condition then—— (*To the GUARDS*) Bring him in.

GHEREA (*rising and saluting*): Very good, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: But first warn him that there must be no more outbursts.

GHEREA: Understood, Your Lordship.

[He salutes again and exits.]

JUDGE VLORA: Is the defendant Schneider satisfied with the counsel who has been assigned to him?

[SCHNEIDER appears not to have heard. The guard GLUCA, next to SCHNEIDER, shakes him and forces him to his feet.]

Schneider, are you satisfied to have Dr. Mensch as your counsel?

[MENSCH rises and goes toward SCHNEIDER.]

SCHNEIDER (*stupidly*): What?

[He speaks with a German accent.]

MENSCH: Kurt, you have no objection to me, have you?

SCHNEIDER: Objection? No. No objection.

[He slumps back into his seat.]

JUDGE VLORA: What is wrong with him? Is he ill?

MENSCH: I think it is some form of melancholia, Your Lordship. I am afraid he is not altogether——

[He taps his forehead.]

JUDGE VLORA: Has he been examined by physicians?

MENSCH: Oh, indeed, Your Lordship. Pathologically, they find everything in order. It is entirely a psychological matter.

[He resumes his seat as the two guards, SRAZHIMIR and GHEREA, bring GEORGE into the court-room.]

JUDGE VLORA: Khitov, do you understand the condition upon which you are being readmitted?

GEORGE: Perfectly, Your Lordship. I was wrong to speak as I did. One must play a game according to the rules.

JUDGE MURUSI: Do you consider this proceeding a game?

GEORGE: I spoke figuratively, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: We are not engaged in playing games, Khitov. You are being tried for your life. It is a serious matter and we wish to give you every opportunity to defend yourself. But the dignity and decorum of the proceedings must be preserved.

GEORGE: I agree to that, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: Let him resume his place. Now you may proceed, Dr. Bathory.

[GEORGE and the GUARDS resume their places. CONRAD introduces himself to GEORGE and engages in a whispered conversation with him.]

THE PROSECUTOR: Your Lordships, we are here to demand the execution of the defendants, George Khitov, Lydia Kuman and Kurt

Schneider. Their guilt is known to everyone. To begin with, they are self-avowed members of the infamous People's Party, which was dissolved and outlawed, more than two years ago, by a decree of our Leader, Minister-President Grigori Vesnic. The People's Party, as we all know, is composed of enemies of the fatherland.

CONRAD: Your Lordships, I thought that political questions——

JUDGE VLORA: Silence, please. Continue.

THE PROSECUTOR: We are not here to conduct a debate, M. American Citizen. We are here to demand justice. The defendants are guilty of heinous political crimes. The woman Kuman is the wife of the notorious Alexander Kuman, who has already been condemned to death for his treasonable machinations. Khitov has been a partner in Alexander Kuman's dastardly plotting and has succeeded him as the ringleader of the People's Party. Schneider is their hireling and their tool. Together, these three conspired to assassinate our noble Leader, Grigori Vesnic, not merely as an act of personal vengeance, but with the intention of weakening the authority of the National Government and giving the signal for a revolt against it. That their plan has failed miserably, we can attribute to the loyalty and devotion of our people and to the gracious intervention of Almighty God, which deflected the assassin's bullet and spared the life of our Leader. For weeks, the Minister-President has hovered precariously between life and death. I have here the latest bulletin from his physician.

[He reads.]

"While the condition of Minister-President Grigori Vesnic continues to improve, it cannot yet be said with certainty that he is out of danger. But, with the help of God, we hope to restore him to the devoted and unified nation." For the murderous wretches at whose door the

responsibility rests, there can be no verdict but death. Even to concede them a trial is to grant them a right from which the nature of their act should exclude them. But our enlightened and just National Government does not condemn without a hearing. And so we proceed to the presentation of the evidence, confident that this monstrous crime will be avenged and that justice will be swift and summary.

[Enthusiastic applause.]

JUDGE VLORA: Do the defendant's counsel wish to reply?

STAMBULOV: We shall reserve our reply until later, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA (*to the PROSECUTOR*): Call your witnesses.

THE PROSECUTOR: Dr. Constantine Parvan.

[PARVAN, a small man, past forty, formally dressed in a morning-coat, mounts the tribune.]

JUDGE VLORA: Do you wish to take the oath?

PARVAN: Yes, Your Lordship.

THE CLERK (*presenting him with a crucifix*): Do you swear, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, that you will in no way depart from the truth, neither adding thereto nor omitting therefrom, upon peril to your immortal soul?

PARVAN: Amen.

[He crosses himself.]

THE PROSECUTOR: State who you are, please.

PARVAN: I am Dr. Constantine Parvan, private secretary to Minister-President Grigori Vesnic.

THE PROSECUTOR: You were an eye-witness of the attempted assassination, were you not?

PARVAN: Yes.

THE PROSECUTOR: Describe the circumstances.

PARVAN: On Thursday, the seventh of March——

THE PROSECUTOR: That is to say, four days before the crime?

PARVAN: Yes. On Thursday, this woman came to my office and introduced herself as Lydia Kuman, the wife of the traitor Alexander Kuman——

LYDIA: It is not he who is a traitor.

JUDGE VLORA: Continue.

PARVAN: She asked permission to see the Minister-President in order that she might plead for clemency for her husband whose death sentence had been confirmed by the Supreme Council. I told her to return next day, and that, meanwhile, I would see if it were possible to arrange the appointment. The next morning——

LYDIA: He also told me it would be easier to arrange if I would agree to spend the night with him.

PARVAN (*calmly*): The suggestion came from Mme Kuman, Your Lordships.

LYDIA: Oh!

PARVAN: I did not refer to it, from considerations of delicacy.

LYDIA: Listen to him!

JUDGE MURUSI: These are entirely personal matters with which we cannot concern ourselves—interesting though they may be.

[*He looks about. Laughter.*]

JUDGE VLORA (*to PARVAN*): Continue.

PARVAN: She returned the next morning, Friday, and I informed her that the Minister-President had graciously agreed to receive her on Monday, the eleventh, at eleven o'clock.

JUDGE STURDZA: And did you—that is to say, did you and she——?

PARVAN: No, Your Lordship. I never confuse my private pleasures with my public duties.

JUDGE STURDZA: Yes, yes; a very good principle, indeed.

JUDGE VLORA: Go on.

PARVAN: She asked if she might bring with her some other person to support her plea. I said yes, but not more than one person.

LYDIA: But I changed my mind.

JUDGE VLORA: Silence, please. You will be given an opportunity later. Continue.

PARVAN: On Monday, the eleventh, at the appointed time, I was with the Minister-President in his private cabinet. My clerk announced that the Kuman woman had arrived, with a companion.

LYDIA: I came alone.

PARVAN: The Minister-President ordered that they be shown in, and a moment later she entered, accompanied by this man Schneider.

LYDIA: I had never seen him before.

JUDGE VLORA: If you please! (*To PARVAN*) You identify the defendant Schneider here as the man who accompanied Mme Kuman?

PARVAN: Beyond any question.

JUDGE VLORA: Continue.

PARVAN: The Kuman woman asked that her husband's life be spared——

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Was anyone else present?

PARVAN: No, Your Lordship. Only the Minister-President, myself and the two assassins.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Continue.

PARVAN: She began with apparent calmness, but soon became more and more vehement, her voice rising, her expressions growing more extravagant——

THE PROSECUTOR: And how did our Leader reply?

PARVAN: As always, he was firm, logical and eloquent. He rehearsed the crimes of Alexander Kuman. He denounced the People's Party, as a band of outlaws and traitors, who are seeking to undermine the foundations of our glorious National Government and to lead our people to destruction and anarchy.

[*The spectators applaud.*]

In conclusion, he refused to annul Kuman's death-sentence, with a warning that all others like him would receive the same treatment.

[*More applause and cries of "Bravo."*]

GEORGE (*to the spectators*): Howl, you jackals! But we're not dead yet.

THE PROSECUTOR (*venomously, to GEORGE*): Not yet—but the sword is being sharpened!

GEORGE: A sword sometimes has two edges.

JUDGE VLORA (*striking his bell*): Khitov, I must warn you——! (*To PARVAN*) Continue.

PARVAN: At the conclusion of the Minister-President's inspired words, her eyes blazed with a murderous fire. She turned to Schneider and said——

LYDIA: No!

PARVAN: She turned to Schneider and said: "It is as I thought—hopeless! Now, only one thing remains, Kurt."

LYDIA: No!

[*CONRAD and STAMBULOV plead with her to be silent.*]

PARVAN: At these words, Schneider drew a pistol from his pocket. I uttered a cry of warning, but it was too late. He fired twice and the bullets struck our Leader in the chest and in the shoulder, one of them passing through his

body and shattering the mirror on the wall behind him. He fell to the floor. I seized Schneider's arm and wrested the pistol from him. People rushed into the room and took the assassins into custody. That's all.

THE PROSECUTOR: Now, if you will be so good, Dr. Parvan, I shall ask you to identify several objects.

PARVAN: Certainly.

THE PROSECUTOR (*to MALINOV, his assistant*): The shirt first.

[MALINOV rummages in a large document case and takes out a green uniform shirt, which he hands to the PROSECUTOR.]

(*Holding up the shirt*): Dr. Parvan, do you recognise this shirt, with bullet-holes in the right breast and in the right shoulder, as the one which the Minister-President was wearing at the time of the crime?

PARVAN: Yes, I do.

THE PROSECUTOR: The mirror next.

[SUTZU, the PROSECUTOR's clerk, brings forward and uncovers a small wall-mirror, with the glass shattered.]

And this is the mirror which was shattered by the bullet after it passed through the Minister-President's body?

PARVAN: Yes.

THE PROSECUTOR: I have here, also, the written report of Professor Callimachi, the Minister-President's personal physician, describing the injuries, as well as a complete file of the daily bulletins issued by him.

[GEORGE *whispers to* CONRAD and STAMBULOV.]

JUDGE VLORA: We have already seen them.

STAMBULOV: Your Lordships, the defendants ask that Professor Callimachi be called upon to testify.

JUDGE MURUSI: For what purpose?

THE PROSECUTOR: For the purposes of confusion and delay, Your Lordships may be sure.

JUDGE VLORA: We have here a detailed written report.

CONRAD: We should like an opportunity to question him.

THE PROSECUTOR (*sarcastically*): Are you a professor of medicine as well?

STAMBULOV: There is no question of Professor Callimachi's eminence, Your Lordships.

GEORGE: Nor of the fact that he is Vesnic's brother-in-law.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Do you dare insinuate——?

CONRAD (*before GEORGE can reply*): We insinuate nothing. We ask only for an opportunity to question the doctor.

JUDGE VLORA: We shall take your request under consideration. What next?

THE PROSECUTOR (*to MALINOV*): The pistol.

[MALINOV *produces the pistol and hands it to the* PROSECUTOR.

Is this the pistol which was fired by Schneider and which you took away from him?

PARVAN: Yes.

JUDGE STURDZA (*reaching out his hand*): Allow me!

THE PROSECUTOR: Certainly, Your Lordship. (*He hands it up and the JUDGES pass it about and examine it.*) We have several witnesses who will prove that this pistol is the property of George Khitov.

GEORGE: Why prolong the farce with your useless witnesses? I admit that the pistol is mine.

JUDGE TSANKOV: You admit it?

GEORGE: Certainly. It was stolen from my room.

JUDGE MURUSI: Stolen by whom?

GEORGE: That I cannot say, Your Lordship. The thief, who is undoubtedly a very clever fellow, did not steal it in my presence.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Have you any proof that it was stolen?

GEORGE: Only that when I left my room on Sunday morning, the day before the shooting, the pistol was in its usual place on my table. And when I returned, at night, it was missing.

JUDGE MURUSI: That is not proof that it was stolen.

THE PROSECUTOR: We shall prove that Khitov gave the pistol to Schneider on that same Sunday evening.

GEORGE: If you can prove that, you can prove anything!

JUDGE VLORA (*to GEORGE*): Take your seat!
(*To PARVAN*) Did Schneider also plead for Alexander Kuman?

PARVAN: No, he said nothing.

THE PROSECUTOR: No! He came to act, not to speak.

STAMBULOV: Did you know who Schneider was? Had you ever seen him before?

PARVAN: Never.

STAMBULOV: Did Mme Kuman introduce him to the Minister-President?

PARVAN: No. She began at once with her plea, which was apparently carefully rehearsed.

LYDIA: No, it was not. I spoke spontaneously.

CONRAD: Neither you nor the Minister-President inquired who Schneider was nor why he was there?

PARVAN: No. Why? We naturally assumed that

he was some friend or relative of the Kuman woman. She had asked permission to bring a friend.

STAMBULOV: Was no one else present in the room? No secretaries? No guards?

PARVAN: No. Only the Minister-President and myself.

STAMBULOV: But is it customary for the Minister-President to receive visitors in this informal manner?

PARVAN: Yes, why not? He is proud of the devotion and veneration of our people.

[*Loud applause.*]

Could he foresee that his condescension in granting this woman an audience would be rewarded by a murderous assault?

THE PROSECUTOR: Is it Dr. Stambulov's intention to rebuke our Leader for receiving people freely and fearlessly?

STAMBULOV: No, no, certainly not! Please do not misunderstand me. On the contrary, I was merely attempting to suggest that greater care be taken to safeguard his person.

PARVAN: We have learned our lesson. In the future we shall know how to deal with our enemies.

GEORGE: Have you enough battalions for that?

JUDGE TSANKOV (*striking the table*): Enough of these treasonable utterances!

THE PROSECUTOR: Your Lordships, are these threats to be permitted?

JUDGE VLORA: We are not concerned with threats. We are here to weigh the evidence. (*To GEORGE*) You are only damaging your own cause. Are there further questions?

THE PROSECUTOR: No, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: The defence?

STAMBULOV: No, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: Then you are excused, Dr. Parvan.

PARVAN: Thank you, Your Lordships. I conclude my testimony with the hope that this monstrous attempt upon the life of our revered Leader, an act which has aroused the horror and anger of the whole nation, will be speedily avenged.

[Amid applause, he makes a formal bow to the court, leaves the tribune and resumes his seat.]

MALINOV (looking around): The next witness is Vasili Bassaraba.

BASSARABA (bobbing up): Yes, sir. Right here, sir.

MALINOV: Come forward.

BASSARABA: Yes, sir. Coming!

[He bustles forward, very self-conscious and nervous.]

THE PROSECUTOR: May he be given the oath, Your Lordships?

JUDGE TSANKOV: Are you a member of the National Party?

BASSARABA: Oh, yes, Your Lordship. Yes, indeed. Have been for over seven years. And pure Slavic on both sides, Your Lordships. Not a drop of Latin, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Negro or German blood in me.

JUDGE VLORA: Let him take the oath.

THE CLERK: Do you swear, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, that you will in no way depart from the truth, neither adding thereto nor omitting therefrom, upon peril to your immortal soul?

BASSARABA: Oh, yes, I do. Indeed, yes. *(He falls on his knees and crosses himself. Then he rises, and goes to the tribune, stumbling and almost falling.)*

Excuse me, Your Lordships. Don't think I'm drunk. I'm not a drinking-man at all. It's just my knees. A little shaky. This is something new for me. I've always managed to keep myself out of the courts.

THE PROSECUTOR: Stop chattering.

BASSARABA: Yes, sir. I just didn't want Their Lordships to get the impression——

THE PROSECUTOR: Pay attention to the questions I am going to ask you.

BASSARABA: All right, sir. I'm ready.

[He clears his throat.]

THE PROSECUTOR: Where are you employed?

BASSARABA: Well, sir, I'm a café waiter. Have been now for—let me see—seventeen, eighteen years. I'm a widower with three children. One boy is in the army and the other is apprentice to an undertaker in Adrianople Street. He seems to have a gift for it. My daughter hasn't turned out so well, Your Lordships. She was seduced when she was seventeen by a policeman, and ever since then that way of life seems to have come natural to her.

THE PROSECUTOR: Never mind all that. Where——

BASSARABA: Forgive me, sir. But you see, sir, a father can't help——

THE PROSECUTOR: Where are you employed?

BASSARABA: Where? Oh, at the Café Danube, sir, on the Eighth of October Street, just across from the Horse Market. It's a modest place, Your Lordships. Coffee, black or white, ten. Five for a glass of beer and twenty-five for cognac.

JUDGE STURDZA: Impossible! What sort of cognac?

BASSARABA: Well, confidentially, Your Lordship, I think a little water goes into the bottle.

THE PROSECUTOR: You see these defendants here. Do you recognise any of them?

BASSARABA: Oh, yes; yes, indeed, sir. All of them.

THE PROSECUTOR: Where have you seen them, before?

BASSARABA: Why, at the café, sir. M. Khitov lives just around the corner in Nicolai Street and he's one of our regular clients—that is, he used to be, before he was arrested and taken to prison.

THE PROSECUTOR: And Mme Kuman—she was one of the clients, too?

BASSARABA: Oh, yes, sir. Yes, indeed, sir. And the German gentleman, too—M. Schneider, isn't it?

THE PROSECUTOR: Yes. He came in, too?

BASSARABA: Yes, sir. I used to say a few words to him in German, now and again. I learned a little German from my wife. She's dead now, poor thing—died of pneumonia. But she used to work for a German family—cook—and that's how she picked up a little German. I don't approve of talking foreign languages, myself—we must preserve our national culture—but when you are a waiter in a café, the clients are thankful for a little attention like that. So whenever M. Schneider came in—

THE PROSECUTOR: Yes, very well. Did Mme Kuman come often?

BASSARABA: Well, you might call it often. Not every night, you understand, like our regular clients, but now and then. Sometimes with her little girl and sometimes with her husband, Alexander Kuman—the one who's going to be beheaded next week.

JUDGE TSANKOV: What is this café—a rendezvous for conspirators?

BASSARABA: Oh, no, Your Lordship. We get all sorts. Respectable people, mostly: soldiers, Party members, people from the Horse Market

and now and then a lawyer or an official, who wants a quiet corner, where he can talk to a lady. The girls attract people, too. Very pretty, some of them—young peasants, fresh from the provinces. But, of course, in the café business, you have to take the bad with the good.

THE PROSECUTOR: The proprietor is a loyal Party Member, Your Lordship. I can vouch for that. Much valuable information is picked up in these places.

GEORGE: What he means is that the waiters are spies in the pay of the National Party.

BASSARABA: You needn't call me a spy, M. Khitov. I've always earned an honest living. I'm the father of seven children, all of them legitimate, and three of them still living. I'm sure a man can't be blamed for keeping his ears open.

THE PROSECUTOR: It is the duty of every patriot to inform the government of the activities of those who are conspiring against it.

BASSARABA: That's what I say !

THE PROSECUTOR: Bassaraba, when was the last time you saw the defendants at the Café Danube ?

BASSARABA: The last time ? Well, let me see, now. You mean all three of them ? When I saw them there ?

THE PROSECUTOR: Yes. It was the afternoon of Sunday, March tenth, was it not ? The day before the Minister-President was shot ?

BASSARABA: Yes, sir, it was. That's exactly when it was. Sunday afternoon, the tenth of March. And the very next day, we read about that bloody attempt on the life of our glorious Leader. (*He extends his arm in the national salute*) God be praised for sparing him to us.

JUDGE VLORA: Do you mean that you saw them there together—all three of them?

BASSARABA: Yes, Your Lordship. All three of them. M. Khitov, and Mme Kuman and the German gentleman.

LYDIA: That's a lie.

GEORGE: Let the little rabbit earn his pay, Lydia.

BASSARABA: I'm no more of a rabbit than you are, M. Khitov. I don't see what right he has to call me a rabbit.

THE PROSECUTOR: Are these defendants to be permitted, Your Lordships, to insult government witnesses to their face?

JUDGE VLORA: The defendants will refrain from making audible remarks. Continue.

THE PROSECUTOR: At what time did you see the defendants there? You said seven o'clock, did you not?

CONRAD: Excuse me, Your Lordships, but he said nothing of the kind.

THE PROSECUTOR: I have his preliminary examination here, in which he clearly states that it was seven o'clock.

BASSARABA: Yes, sir, that's right. It was seven o'clock.

THE PROSECUTOR: His testimony will be corroborated by other witnesses, Your Lordships. Now what were the defendants doing, Bassaraba?

BASSARABA: What were they doing? Well, sir, they were sitting there.

THE PROSECUTOR: Sitting at a table? Drinking and talking?

BASSARABA: Yes, sir. Drinking and talking.

GEORGE: Perhaps the honourable prosecutor was also there—disguised as a street-walker.

[Suppressed laughter.]

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THE PROSECUTOR: I demand that a stop be put to this !

JUDGE VLORA: Khitov, if this happens again, you will be removed.

GEORGE: I apologise to Your Lordship.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Reporter, we want all these insults included in the minutes.

THE REPORTER: Yes, Your Lordship.

THE PROSECUTOR: Bassaraba, did you overhear any conversation among the defendants ?

BASSARABA: Well, sir, a man can't help keeping his ears open. (*To KHITOV*) And I don't call that spying, either.

JUDGE VLORA (*striking his bell*): You are not to address remarks to the prisoners.

BASSARABA: Please excuse me, Your Lordship. It is because I am not accustomed——

THE PROSECUTOR: What did you hear them say ?

BASSARABA: Well, I heard the lady say, Mme Kuman—she said: "Gentlemen, everything is arranged—everything is arranged as we planned. To-morrow morning, I am going to see our glorified Leader, Grigori Vesnic."

[*He gives the national salute.*]

THE PROSECUTOR: Did she say: "Our glorified Leader" ?

BASSARABA: No, sir. She used another expression which I cannot bring myself to repeat.

LYDIA: Oh !

[*CONRAD pleads with her to be quiet.*]

THE PROSECUTOR: Did you overhear anything else ?

BASSARABA: No, sir. I can't say that I did. Sunday is a busy day, sir. Besides, the clients don't like it when you stand around and listen to their conversation. Your Lordships would be

surprised if you knew the sort of things that people talk about in cafés.

THE PROSECUTOR: But they went on talking intimately together, did they not?

BASSARABA: Oh, yes, sir. Indeed, they did. Right on talking.

THE PROSECUTOR: Then, later on, did you see anything happen?

[He looks in the direction of the judges' table, where the pistol is lying.]

BASSARABA (*following his glance*): Later on? Let me see. Oh, yes, sir. That was when M. Khitov handed the German gentleman the pistol.

[GEORGE laughs aloud.]

JUDGE MURUSI: You say that you saw Khitov hand Schneider a pistol?

BASSARABA: Yes, Your Lordship.

THE PROSECUTOR (*pointing to the pistol*): And it was that pistol?

BASSARABA: Yes, sir. That's the very one.

JUDGE TSANKOV: In other words, on the evening before the crime you saw Khitov hand Schneider this pistol, with which Schneider wounded the Minister-President.

BASSARABA: Yes, Your Lordship, that's what it amounts to.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: How can you be sure it is the same pistol?

THE PROSECUTOR: Khitov has admitted the ownership of the pistol, Your Lordship. This merely corroborates his admission and explains how Schneider came into possession of it.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Khitov claims that the pistol was stolen from his room.

THE PROSECUTOR: Let him prove it.

GEORGE: How can a man prove——!

[He subsides with a gesture of helplessness.]

STAMBULOV: M. Bassaraba, this is a very serious matter. The lives of the defendants are at stake. Are you quite certain that you actually heard these three defendants discussing Mme Kuman's appointment with the Minister-President and that you actually saw Khitov give a pistol to Schneider? Please consider your answer carefully. I am sure you do not wish the responsibility for condemning innocent people to death.

BASSARABA: I don't call them innocent. I am not a lawyer or a judge—just a simple café waiter, who tries to make an honest living. But when people join the People's Party, which everybody knows is forbidden, and then plot together against the life of our glorified Leader who has revived the national spirit and unified the nation, I don't call that innocent.

[Applause from the spectators.]

CONRAD: M. Bassaraba, did you not think it was your duty to report immediately to the police what you had seen and heard?

THE PROSECUTOR: Why? He heard no threat—only a reference to the appointment between Mme Kuman and the Minister-President.

CONRAD: But the pistol!

THE PROSECUTOR: That became significant only in the light of what happened next day. The witness is not noted for his mental powers—

GEORGE: We concede that.

BASSARABA: A café waiter's brains are in his feet.

THE PROSECUTOR: The mere fact that two men exchanged a pistol would not indicate—

JUDGE MURUSI: Firearms, M. Noli, are almost as common here as in America.

[Polite laughter.]

JUDGE STURDZA (*laughing heartily*): Very good !

THE PROSECUTOR: Besides, Your Lordships, as the preliminary hearing shows, the witness was in contact with the police, within three hours after the shooting.

GEORGE: If not forty-eight hours before.

BASSARABA (*to KHITOV*): A lot of good your brains will do you, when your head is separated from your body.

[*Laughter.*]

JUDGE VLORA (*striking his bell*): Silence !

BASSARABA: I'm sorry, Your Lordship, if——

THE PROSECUTOR: Nothing further, Bassaraba. You may go.

BASSARABA: Oh ! You mean I'm all finished ?

MALINOV: Yes. Step down.

BASSARABA: Certainly, sir. With the greatest of pleasure. Thank you, sir. Good day, Your Lordships.

[*He steps down and looks about in bewilderment.*]

MALINOV motions to him to leave.

Thank you, sir.

[*He hurries toward the right.*]

GEORGE (*as BASSARABA approaches the door*): Waiter, a dark beer !

BASSARABA (*mechanically; glancing over his shoulder*): Right away, sir. (*Confused*) I mean to say—I forgot—My God, what a day !

[*He stumbles his way out.*]

THE PROSECUTOR: The headsman will know how to stop your laughter, Khitov.

JUDGE VLORA (*striking his bell*): Have you other witnesses who saw the defendants together in the café ?

THE PROSECUTOR: Yes, Your Lordship. The

waiter, Zamfirescu, and five other citizens who were there.

JUDGE VLORA: Call them.

THE PROSECUTOR: Certainly, Your Lordship. But first I shall call the prisoner, Kurt Schneider.

[A murmur runs through the court-room. SCHNEIDER remains impassive.]

Take him to the tribune.

[The guards, GLUCA and GHEREA, sitting beside SCHNEIDER, shake him and tell him to rise. SCHNEIDER complies mechanically and permits GLUCA to lead him to the tribune. He stands passive, with the guard behind him.]

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Is he to be given the oath?

THE PROSECUTOR: He is a German and a Protestant, Your Lordship. The oath is a solemn sacrament which should be reserved for Slavs and patriots.

JUDGE TSANKOV: I agree.

[JUDGE VLORA holds a whispered conference with JUDGE MURUSI and JUDGE STURDZA.]

JUDGE VLORA: We shall dispense with the oath.

THE PROSECUTOR: Schneider, you are a member of the People's Party, are you not?

[The GUARD prods him.]

SCHNEIDER: Yes, yes. A member of the People's Party.

GEORGE: That is a lie. The People's Party does not admit such riff-raff to membership.

THE PROSECUTOR: I have here the membership card which was found on Schneider when he was arrested.

[He hands the card to the COURT REPORTER.]

GEORGE: It is a forgery.

THE PROSECUTOR: Perhaps you will produce the membership rolls, so that we can see for ourselves?

GEORGE: No, M. Hangman. All of Vesnic's torture-experts couldn't make me do that.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Moderate your language when you speak of our Leader.

GEORGE: He is not my Leader.

JUDGE VLORA: Permit us to examine this membership card.

THE COURT REPORTER: Yes, Your Lordship.

[He hands the card to JUDGE VLORA. The JUDGES pass it from hand to hand.]

THE PROSECUTOR: Schneider, do you admit that you shot the Minister-President?

SCHNEIDER: What?

THE PROSECUTOR: It is true, is it not, that you shot the Minister-President?

SCHNEIDER: Yes, I shot him.

[He points his finger and clicks his tongue.]

JUDGE VLORA: Why did you do it?

SCHNEIDER: Yes, I did it.

JUDGE VLORA: But why? For what reason?

SCHNEIDER *(his eyes suddenly blazing)*: Down with all tyrants! He stole my liberties! I am a man! Kurt Schneider! A man! Down with tyranny!

GEORGE *(rising)*: Bravo! Bravo! Down with tyranny! Down with the National Government!

JUDGE TSANKOV: Out with him!

JUDGE STURDZA *(simultaneously)*: Silence!

JUDGE VLORA: Remove him!

CONRAD: Your Lordships——!

[The guards, SRAZHIMIR and GHEREA, drag GEORGE from his seat and take him towards the door. He makes no physical resistance, but keeps shouting his defiance.]

GEORGE: Down with tyranny? Long live the

people ! Down with Rakovski ! Down with Vesnic !

[*The GUARDS drag him off. The court-room buzzes with excitement.*

JUDGE VLORA (*striking his bell*): Silence ! Silence !

[*The excitement subsides.*

Continue.

CONRAD : Your Lordship——

JUDGE VLORA : No ! He has been shown every leniency. He has exceeded the limits of our patience.

CONRAD : This is vital testimony, Your Lordship. He has a right to hear the testimony against him.

JUDGE VLORA : At the end of the session, a *résumé* will be read to him. Continue.

CONRAD : Your Lordship, I respectfully beg——

JUDGE VLORA : Silence !

[*CONRAD resumes his seat.*

THE PROSECUTOR : Schneider, did you meet Khitov and the Kuman woman in the café on the night before the crime ?

[*The GUARD prods him.*

SCHNEIDER : Café. Yes. Café Danube. Eighth of October Street.

LYDIA : No !

SCHNEIDER : Café. Eighth of October Street.

[*He passes his hand across his forehead.*

JUDGE VLORA : He seems ill. Are you ill, Schneider ?

SCHNEIDER : What ? Café Danube.

THE PROSECUTOR : The prison physician examined him this morning, Your Lordship.

MENSCH (*rising*): It is a form of melancholia, Your Lordship. His heredity is bad.

THE PROSECUTOR: Now, Schneider, listen carefully.

SCHNEIDER (*pounding his chest*): I am an exile.

THE PROSECUTOR: Listen, Schneider. It was at the meeting at the café, was it not, that the other two prisoners suggested that you go with the Kuman woman to the Minister-President's and shoot him? Isn't that so?

SCHNEIDER: Yes.

[CONRAD restrains LYDIA from interrupting.]

THE PROSECUTOR: And you agreed, did you not, because, as a member of the People's Party, you wished to destroy the Government?

SCHNEIDER: Yes.

THE PROSECUTOR: And there was another reason, was there not?

SCHNEIDER: Yes.

THE PROSECUTOR: You were the lover of the Kuman woman, weren't you?

LYDIA: Oh!

SCHNEIDER (*grinning*): Yes. I was her lover.

LYDIA (*rising*): I do not know him. I have never spoken to him.

JUDGE VLORA: Be seated, please. You will have an opportunity to testify.

LYDIA: But this is——

JUDGE VLORA: Silence, please.

SCHNEIDER (*turning toward the judges*): I have had many women—many women. They cannot resist me. I am too handsome. But it is not only my looks. Oh, no! Oh, no! (*He chuckles.*)

THE PROSECUTOR: And it was because of your infatuation that you agreed to commit this horrible crime, was it not?

SCHNEIDER: Yes. Handsome Kurt, they call me.

JUDGE VLORA: Where did you get the pistol?

SCHNEIDER: What?

THE PROSECUTOR: The pistol. Did Khitov give it to you?

SCHNEIDER: Yes. Khitov.

THE PROSECUTOR: And next day you went with the Kuman woman to the Minister-President's cabinet, and when she gave you the signal, you fired the pistol. That is what happened, is it not?

SCHNEIDER: Yes.

THE PROSECUTOR: Have you anything further to add?

SCHNEIDER: No. Yes!

JUDGE VLORA: What is it?

SCHNEIDER: Yes, I want to be shot—not beheaded. A little bullet-hole here, that will not spoil my looks.

[*The spectators titter.*]

JUDGE TSANKOV: You deserve to be torn to pieces, you German swine.

[SCHNEIDER *stares at him, then turns away.*]

SCHNEIDER (*hysterically*): Shot—not beheaded.

JUDGE VLORA: We shall reserve further examination of this witness until his mind is clearer. Does the defence wish to question him?

[CONRAD *confers hastily with STAMBULOV.*]

STAMBULOV: Not now, Your Lordship. Not until we have taken the testimony of Mme Kuman.

JUDGE VLORA: That is all, Schneider. Step down.

[*The GUARD assists SCHNEIDER back to his seat.* He should have constant medical attention. Perhaps the prison-doctor is not competent to deal—

THE PROSECUTOR: Another doctor will be provided, Your Lordship.

CONRAD: Your Lordships, he looks to me as though he had been drugged.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Yes, I agree.

JUDGE VLORA: Is there any evidence——?

MENSCH: In my opinion, it is a psychopathic case, Your Lordships.

SCHNEIDER (*half-rising*): Handsome Kurt is what the ladies call me.

JUDGE MURUSI: He seems fascinated by his own beauty. Perhaps if someone presented him with a mirror——

[*Laughter.* JUDGE STURDZA has a coughing-fit. GHEREA, the guard, returns.

STAMBULOV: Now, Mme Kuman, if you please.

[*LYDIA goes to the tribune accompanied by the guard, GHEREA.*

THE CLERK (*to JUDGE VLORA*): Your Lordships, shall I give her the oath?

LYDIA: No, Your Lordships, I cannot swear——

THE PROSECUTOR: We do not allow the oath to be taken by outlaws and criminals.

CONRAD: She is not a criminal yet. Only a person accused of crime.

THE PROSECUTOR: This is not America. We punish the enemies of society, instead of making heroes of them.

[*Applause and cries of "Bravo."*

JUDGE VLORA (*striking his bell*): Proceed with the examination of the witness.

STAMBULOV: Mme Kuman, you have heard the testimony of Dr. Constantine Parvan, the Minister-President's secretary?

LYDIA: Yes, I have heard it. It is false.

STAMBULOV: Be good enough to tell us in

exactly what particulars you disagree with Dr. Parvan's testimony.

LYDIA: In every particular. It is false from beginning to end.

JUDGE VLORA: You must be more specific. Do you deny that you visited Dr. Parvan in order to request an interview with the Minister-President?

LYDIA: No, I do not deny that. When the Supreme Council confirmed my husband's death sentence, I knew that only one hope remained: to appeal to the Minister-President for clemency. Every day, for a week, I wrote to him, begging him to see me. But no answer. Then, as a last resort, I decided to go in person.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Were you acting upon the advice of Khitov?

LYDIA: No, Your Lordship. Against it. He advised me not to go. He said it was hopeless. Nevertheless, I went. I could not neglect any chance, no matter how slight.

STAMBULOV: Describe your interview with Dr. Parvan.

JUDGE VLORA: This was on Thursday, the seventh of March?

LYDIA: Yes, Your Lordship, on Thursday. Well, I begged for an interview. He laughed at me and at my husband—called us vile names. Then he told me to return the next day. I have told you already what conditions he proposed to me.

JUDGE MURUSI: But you refused his conditions?

LYDIA: Yes, Your Lordship, I refused. But I was prepared to agree, if it became necessary.

THE PROSECUTOR: Yes, we readily believe that.

LYDIA: Yes, I'd stop at nothing to save my husband's life.

THE PROSECUTOR: Not even at assassinating the Minister-President.

LYDIA: I am guiltless of that. When I returned next day, Dr. Parvan told me that the Minister-President had consented to see me on Monday. I was overjoyed. I had feared a refusal.

JUDGE STURDZA: And did Dr. Parvan refer to—that is, did he again request——?

LYDIA: No, Your Lordship. His manner had changed completely. He was most courteous. I began to think that perhaps I had misjudged him. I even dared to ask whether I might bring someone with me.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Why?

LYDIA: I wanted George Khitov to join me in my plea. He is so eloquent, so convincing. And I was afraid that in the presence of the Minister-President I would lose courage, that I would be unable to find words.

STAMBULOV: Continue.

LYDIA: When I left the Ministerial Palace, I went straight to Khitov's room, but——

THE PROSECUTOR: You went to his room?

LYDIA: Yes. We are old friends.

THE PROSECUTOR: I believe that, too.

LYDIA: There is only friendship between George and me. Our strongest bond is the love we both feel for Alexander.

JUDGE VLORA: And what occurred between you and Khitov?

LYDIA: He was not at home, Your Lordship. I left a note for him telling him that the interview had been arranged and that I wanted him to accompany me. The next day, Saturday, I received a reply, asking me to meet him Sunday evening, at the Café Danube.

JUDGE MURUSI: Then you were at the Café

Danube on Sunday evening ? And Khitov was there also ?

LYDIA : Yes, Your Lordship. I went with my little girl, to meet him, as he had asked me to. We often met there.

JUDGE VLORA : Your daughter was with you, you say ?

LYDIA : Yes, Your Lordship. I had promised to take her to the cinema, in celebration of the granting of the interview. But first we went to the café to meet George. We began at once to discuss the question of the interview. I begged him to go with me and help me plead for Alexander, but he was afraid that his presence would do more harm than good and that it would be much better if I went alone. At last, he persuaded me that he was right and I agreed to go alone.

THE PROSECUTOR : He was afraid of being arrested, was that it ?

LYDIA : He is afraid of nothing.

THE PROSECUTOR : We shall see.

STAMBULOV : Then what ?

LYDIA : We left the café. Sonia and I went to the Palace Cinema on Trinity Boulevard and George walked off, in the opposite direction.

STAMBULOV : He left the café with you ?

LYDIA : Yes. We said good night at the door. I wanted to leave him as quickly as possible. He had told me that I had nothing to hope from the interview—and I did not want him to see my tears. Sonia was crying, too. We might as well have gone home for all we saw of the cinema.

STAMBULOV : And Schneider. Was he sitting with you, while you were talking to Khitov ?

LYDIA : No, no ! Every word of that is untrue—

every word. There was no one—only Sonia and George and I.

THE PROSECUTOR: Do you deny that Schneider was in the café at the time?

LYDIA: How can I deny it? It was Sunday night. There were a hundred people there—two hundred—coming and going. He may have been sitting at the next table for all I know. I was not looking at anyone, not thinking of anything but my husband and what I should say to the Minister-President next morning.

CONRAD: Did George hand a pistol to anyone—Schneider or anyone else—or even take a pistol out of his pocket?

LYDIA: No—absolutely not! We talked together the whole while, and only about the interview.

STAMBULOV: Now we come to Monday—the day of the interview. You went to the Ministerial Palace?

LYDIA: Yes.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Alone?

LYDIA: Yes, Your Lordship, alone.

STAMBULOV: Describe what occurred.

LYDIA: In the ante-chamber to the Minister-President's cabinet, I gave my name to one of the attendants. He went into the cabinet and when he returned he asked me to sit down and wait.

STAMBULOV: Were there other people waiting?

LYDIA: Yes, perhaps five or six. And clerks and officials kept coming and going.

STAMBULOV: Was Kurt Schneider among those who were waiting?

LYDIA: Yes.

JUDGE VLORA: Schneider was waiting in the ante-room when you arrived?

LYDIA: Yes, Your Lordship.

JUDGE MURUSI: Didn't you say that you did not know him?

LYDIA: No, I did not know him. It was the first time I ever saw him.

JUDGE MURUSI: And yet you remember that he was sitting there?

LYDIA: Yes, for a very particular reason.

JUDGE VLORA: What is it?

LYDIA: He kept staring at me. The whole while I was waiting, he never took his eyes off me. It made me feel very uncomfortable.

STAMBULOV: Did he speak to you?

LYDIA: No. He just sat and stared.

STAMBULOV: Did you speak to him?

LYDIA: Certainly not.

STAMBULOV: How long did you wait?

LYDIA: I do not know exactly. Perhaps twenty minutes, perhaps half an hour. It seemed a very long time.

STAMBULOV: And then?

LYDIA: The door of the Minister-President's cabinet opened and General Rakovski, the Minister of Culture and Enlightenment, came out.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: General Rakovski came out of the Minister-President's cabinet?

LYDIA: Yes, Your Lordship.

STAMBULOV: Continue.

LYDIA: Everyone rose and saluted.

THE PROSECUTOR: Did you rise and salute?

LYDIA: I rose. I did not salute.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Why not?

[LYDIA is silent.

Answer !

LYDIA: I think the answer is obvious, Your Lordship.

JUDGE TSANKOV: I order you to answer, whether you think it is obvious or not.

LYDIA: I did not salute because I do not respect General Rakovski, Your Lordship.

[A murmur from the spectators.]

JUDGE VLORA: Continue.

LYDIA: General Rakovski looked straight at me and then left the ante-chamber. The attendant then told me to enter the cabinet. I did. Schneider entered with me.

JUDGE VLORA: Schneider entered with you?

LYDIA: Yes, Your Lordship.

CONRAD: Did that surprise you?

LYDIA: No. I assumed that he was some secretary, or perhaps a police-agent who had been designated to keep watch on me. Especially so since he was admitted without comment or question.

STAMBULOV: Who was in the cabinet when you entered?

LYDIA: Only the Minister-President and Dr. Parvan.

STAMBULOV: And then you began your plea to the Minister-President?

LYDIA: Yes, at once. I was allowed only ten minutes.

CONRAD: What did you say?

THE PROSECUTOR: Of what importance is that—since it was all a subterfuge?

JUDGE VLORA: Let her tell her story.

LYDIA: I do not remember what words I used. Once I was before him, I forgot everything that I had prepared. I spoke only from my heart, from the depth of my love for Alexander. I

spoke to him as a man, not as a statesman. I appealed to his mercy, his generosity, his humanity. I said that whatever Alexander's offences may have been, whatever political errors he may have committed, they did not merit death. Exile, perhaps, or even imprisonment, but not death. He had opposed the government and he must be punished, I knew that. But to take his life, that was too cruel, too severe. "You are a strong man," I said. "A powerful man. You have defeated my husband. You do not need his life. It will gain nothing for you. Spare him and the whole world will acclaim your generosity. We need him, Sonia and I. He is dear to us. Spare him." I could not go on. The tears were choking me.

[She is weeping.]

STAMBULOV: What was the Leader's reply?

LYDIA (*controlling herself*): A blunt and brutal refusal. He heaped abuse upon Alexander—called him a traitor and a criminal. I do not know what all. I did not even listen. I only understood that my last hope was gone.

CONRAD: Dr. Parvan has testified that you turned to Schneider and said: "It is as I thought—hopeless. Now only one thing remains, Kurt." Is that true?

LYDIA: No, it is not—absolutely not. I have never spoken a word to Schneider, not to this day. "It is hopeless"—that I may have said. But if I did, it was only that I was speaking my thoughts aloud—that I was overcome with despair.

STAMBULOV: And then?

LYDIA: Then? Then I turned to go. I could not get out quickly enough. Suddenly, I heard a cry. I saw Schneider with the pistol in his hand. There was a shot. The mirror was shattered. The Minister-President fell. Parvan

struggled with Schneider. The room filled with people. It all happened in a second. That is all. That is the whole story. Every word of it is true. That is all I know about it.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Do you deny that you are a member of the People's Party?

LYDIA: No, I do not deny it.

JUDGE TSANKOV: In short, you admit that you are a traitor?

LYDIA: No, Your Lordship. Not a traitor, but a patriot who wishes to bring liberty and security and enlightenment to an unhappy people.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Enough of that! I forbid you to use this tribunal as a forum for your traitorous utterances. Do you deny that you have been engaged in plotting to overthrow the National Government?

LYDIA: I have been one of those who have demanded that the people shall have the right to choose their own rulers.

THE PROSECUTOR: Do you deny that the leaders of the People's Party were plotting to assassinate the members of the government, including our Leader?

LYDIA: Yes. I deny it absolutely.

THE PROSECUTOR: And if I were to tell you that your husband has admitted the existence of such a plot, what would you say?

LYDIA: I would say that it is simply one more lie.

THE PROSECUTOR: You are mistaken. I have his written confession.

[*The court-room buzzes with excitement.*]

LYDIA (*to the judges*): Does he expect anyone to believe that?

JUDGE VLORA: You say that you have a confession from Alexander Kuman?

THE PROSECUTOR: Yes, Your Lordship. Do you wish to hear it?

JUDGE VLORA: Yes, by all means.

THE PROSECUTOR (*reading*): "I, Alexander Kuman——"

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Is this document dated?

THE PROSECUTOR: Yes, Your Lordship. It is dated yesterday, at half-past six in the evening. Shall I continue?

JUDGE VLORA: If you please.

THE PROSECUTOR: "I, Alexander Kuman, my hours upon this earth being numbered, and wishing to ease the weight of guilt which lies upon my conscience, confess that I committed the crimes of high treason and conspiracy of which I have been convicted. I acknowledge my errors and ask forgiveness of the Government which I sought criminally to overthrow. The popular indignation awakened by the attempt upon the life of our beloved Leader has opened my eyes to the enormity of my crimes. The attempt was the result of a plot entered into before my arrest. I agreed with my wife, George Khitov and others, that if other means failed we would endeavour to bring about the overthrow of the Government by the assassination of the Minister-President. I thank God that the plot has failed and I am glad to atone with my life for my share in it. Signed: Alexander Kuman."

[*During the reading of this document, the excitement in the court-room mounts. LYDIA alone remains calm.*]

JUDGE VLORA: Permit us to examine this document.

THE PROSECUTOR (*handing it up*): It is in Kuman's handwriting.

LYDIA: It is a forgery, Your Lordships.

THE PROSECUTOR: It is witnessed by two of the

prison-guards. They will testify to its authenticity.

LYDIA: Government hirelings. What is their word worth? This is a forgery.

JUDGE MURUSI: Have you any proof of that?

LYDIA: Proof? I know my husband! Do you wish to disprove it? Nothing could be easier, Your Lordships. Send to the prison. He is there—lying in the cell, where they have kept him in chains for three months. Send for him. Bring him here. Let him stand up here—if he is still able to stand!—and show him this stupid forgery. Ask him whether it is his. And when you hear his answer you will know the truth.

THE PROSECUTOR: Unfortunately, Your Lordships, it will be impossible to call Alexander Kuman.

JUDGE VLORA: Why impossible?

THE PROSECUTOR: Because early this morning he hanged himself.

[This announcement creates a sensation.]

LYDIA (*uttering a terrible cry*): Oh! They have murdered him! Assassins! Beasts! Beasts!

CONRAD (*rushing forward*): Lydia!

LYDIA: They have killed him!

[She seizes GEORGE's pistol from the judges' table.]

CONRAD: Stop her, for God's sake!

[A woman screams. LYDIA presses the pistol against her breast, but before she can fire, CONRAD and the GUARD wrest it away from her.]

LYDIA: No! No! Let me die! Alexander! Alexander!

[CONRAD and the GUARD try to restrain her.]

JUDGE VLORA pounds his bell. The court-room is in an uproar.

ACT II

SCENE I

Several days later. The court is in session. JUDGES, LAWYERS, PRISONERS, SPECTATORS—all are seated as before, except that the positions of LYDIA and GEORGE are reversed, so that she is nearer the doors. As the curtain rises, MME MARTHE TEODOROVA is on the tribune, being questioned by the PROSECUTOR. LYDIA, profoundly dispirited, takes almost no interest in the proceedings.

THE PROSECUTOR: Mme Teodorova, are you a member of the National Party?

MME TEODOROVA: No, sir. I am not a member. My husband is a member. (*Hastily*) But I have made my application for membership.

[*She is very nervous throughout.*]

THE PROSECUTOR: Where is your husband employed?

MME TEODOROVA: He is a clerk, sir, in the Ministry of War—in the Bureau of Supplies. His chief has told him that he may expect a promotion.

GEORGE: As a reward for your testimony?

MME TEODOROVA: Oh, no, indeed! Why, nothing of the kind. He——

THE PROSECUTOR: One moment! Does the defendant Khitov charge that the Government's witnesses have been bribed? If he has any evidence to that effect, we shall be glad to hear it.

GEORGE: Unfortunately, Your Lordships, I do not have the privilege of being present when the prosecutor interviews his witnesses. One can only conjecture——

JUDGE TSANKOV: We are not interested in your conjectures.

GEORGE: Excuse my want of tact, Your Lordship.

MME TEODOROVA (*nervously*): Perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned the promotion. I'm sorry if——

THE PROSECUTOR (*angrily*): Silence! Speak when you are spoken to and answer the questions that are put to you.

MME TEODOROVA: Yes, sir.

CONRAD: Is the prosecutor to be allowed to intimidate the witness, Your Lordships?

THE PROSECUTOR: I am not here to take lessons in deportment from aliens.

JUDGE VLORA (*to CONRAD*): Each counsel is permitted to conduct examinations in his own way. Continue.

THE PROSECUTOR: Pay attention now to what I am going to ask you, Mme Teodorova.

MME TEODOROVA: Oh, yes, sir, I shall.

THE PROSECUTOR: Are you certain that the man you saw in the Café Danube in conversation with Khitov and the Kuman woman is the prisoner Schneider whom you see here?

MME TEODOROVA: Well, you see, sir, as I explained, I was with my sister and her husband, at a table just across——

THE PROSECUTOR (*bellowing*): Answer the question! Was it Schneider or was it not?

MME TEODOROVA: Why, yes, sir, it was.

THE PROSECUTOR: You are quite certain?

MME TEODOROVA: Yes, sir.

[CONRAD *whispers to STAMBULOV, who nods in assent.*

CONRAD *rises and leaves quickly, at the right.*

THE PROSECUTOR: What were they—— (*He hesitates as he sees CONRAD leave.*) They were engaged in earnest conversation?

MME TEODOROVA: Yes, sir. Of course, I couldn't hear anything. I was——

THE PROSECUTOR: I am not asking whether you heard anything. I am asking whether they were engaged in earnest conversation?

MME TEODOROVA: Yes, sir.

THE PROSECUTOR: Talking in whispers so as not to be overheard?

MME TEODOROVA: Yes, sir.

STAMBULOV: But if she was on the other side of the café——

JUDGE TSANKOV: The mere fact that she saw the three prisoners together on the eve of the crime is enough.

THE PROSECUTOR: Exactly. It is not likely that they would shout out their plot for all the world to hear.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Had you ever seen any of the prisoners before?

MME TEODOROVA: No, Your Lordship.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Nevertheless, you do not hesitate to identify them?

MME TEODOROVA: Well, Your Lordship, when one takes into consideration how serious a crime——

[GEORGE *laughs*.

STAMBULOV: Excuse me, Your Lordships, but the lady surely could not have known of the seriousness of the crime, on the day before it occurred.

JUDGE VLORA: Yes, that is true, is it not, Mme Teodorova?

MME TEODOROVA (*more and more confused*): Well, not exactly, Your Lordship. That is to say——

JUDGE MURUSI: Not exactly? Please be good enough to explain what you mean by that.

MME TEODOROVA: Well, Your Lordships, I—
So many questions—it's the first time, I ever—

[She looks appealingly at the PROSECUTOR.]

THE PROSECUTOR: The defence is merely attempting to confuse the witness, Your Lordships. Anyone can see what she is: a simple, honest woman of the people. Unfortunately, her intellect is somewhat limited and these—

GEORGE: That seems to be a peculiarity of the Government's witnesses.

JUDGE STURDZA: It is discipline not cleverness that makes nations mighty.

[He looks about for approval. The spectators applaud.]

THE PROSECUTOR: Bravo !

GEORGE: And can the disciplined but not clever witness describe how I was dressed on that famous evening ?

[MME TEODOROVA looks about uncertainly.]

THE PROSECUTOR: Your Lordships—

JUDGE VLORA: Answer his question. How was he dressed ?

MME TEODOROVA: Well—he was dressed in—he was wearing—much as he is now—

GEORGE: You mean the clothes I am wearing now ?

THE PROSECUTOR: Don't twist her words. She said much as you are now. She is a housewife, not a fashion expert.

GEORGE: That is to say I was wearing a coat and trousers and a shirt and a vest. Not a bathing-costume or an evening gown. Is that correct ?

MME TEODOROVA: A bathing-costume ? In a café ? He would have been arrested.

JUDGE TSANKOV: This is a waste of time. It makes no difference what he was wearing. The important thing is that she saw the three prisoners talking together in the café.

THE PROSECUTOR: Exactly, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA (*to Tsankov*): Still—— (*To George*) Do you wish to question her further?

GEORGE: No, Your Lordship.

THE PROSECUTOR: That is all, Mme Teodorova.

MME TEODOROVA: Yes, sir. I hope I have done nothing wrong, Your Lordships. I'm a loyal citizen and an obedient follower of our Leader. (*She salutes.*) Long live Vesnic!

JUDGE VLORA: Nothing further. (*To the Prosecutor*) Call the next witness.

[*MME TEODOROVA steps down. MALINOV motions to her to take her place among the spectators.*

STAMBULOV (*looking toward the doors at the right*): If you please, Dr. Bathory, we have a witness——

THE PROSECUTOR: Certainly.

[*The doors at the right open and CONRAD appears, ushering in SONIA KUMAN, a girl of fourteen. As SONIA enters the room, she catches sight of her mother, who is absorbed in her thoughts.*

SONIA (*with a cry: running towards her mother*): Mama! Mama!

LYDIA (*springing to her feet with a cry of joy*): Sonia! My darling! (*She jumps down from her seat and clasps the child in her arms.*)

SONIA (*half-sobbing*): Oh, mama! Mama! I am so happy to see you! It is such a long time, mama! Are you well, mama?

LYDIA (*simultaneously*): Oh, my darling! How are you, my little baby? Tell mama how you are.

[*They hug and kiss each other. The GUARDS stand by uncertainly, not knowing whether to interfere or not.*

THE PROSECUTOR: Your Lordships, I protest against this demonstration!

JUDGE TSANKOV: Separate them, you numbskulls. Do you hear? Separate them!

[*The GUARDS separate LYDIA and SONIA, who cling together.*]

SONIA: No! No! Mama! Mama!

LYDIA: I haven't seen her in six weeks. Your Lordships, do you even deny me the right to speak to my child?

[*CONRAD tries to calm her.*]

JUDGE VLORA: It is not permissible for prisoners to speak privately to witnesses.

LYDIA: She is not a witness. I don't want her to be a witness.

[*CONRAD pleads inaudibly with her.*]

JUDGE VLORA: That is for you and your counsel to decide.

LYDIA (to CONRAD): No. She is too young. I want her kept out of it.

CONRAD: It's necessary, Lydia!

LYDIA (*still protesting feebly*): It is not right. (*However, she resumes her seat and allows SONIA to be led to the tribune. She now takes a keen interest in the proceedings, following every word.*)

CONRAD: How old are you, Sonia?

SONIA: Fourteen.

JUDGE MURUSI: One moment. Her name is Sonia Kuman?

CONRAD: Yes, Your Lordship. She is the daughter of Alexander Kuman and of my sister.

JUDGE MURUSI: Yes, We inferred that. Continue.

CONRAD: Sonia, you understand, of course, what it means to give testimony in a court. It is a very solemn thing, and you must be careful that everything you say is the exact truth. Do you promise that?

SONIA: Yes, I promise. Neither my father nor my mother would want me to tell lies for them.

THE PROSECUTOR: Are you a member of the National League of Youth?

SONIA: No, sir.

THE PROSECUTOR: Why not?

[SONIA *hesitates*.

GEORGE: Answer truthfully, Sonia.

LYDIA: No, no! They will put her in prison, too. Let her go.

[GEORGE *quiets* LYDIA.

CONRAD: Answer Dr. Bathory's question, Sonia.

SONIA: Because I am not in sympathy with the politics of the National Party.

[*A shocked murmur runs through the court-room.*

JUDGE STURDZA: Well, really——! I must say——!

JUDGE TSANKOV: You are not in sympathy! Where do you get such ideas—from your father, the traitor Alexander Kuman?

SONIA: Excuse me, sir, he is not a traitor. He is——

JUDGE TSANKOV: Quiet! Do not presume to contradict. And address me as "Your Lordship," do you understand?

SONIA: Yes, sir—Your Lordship.

THE PROSECUTOR: You see, Your Lordships—even the minds of the children are infected. And we spend day after day here, quibbling over this or that detail of evidence!

JUDGE VLORA: At this moment, we are concerned with actions, rather than opinions, Dr. Bathory. (*To* CONRAD) Proceed with the examination of the witness.

CONRAD: Sonia, do you remember the evening of Sunday, the tenth of March, the day before the Minister-President was shot?

SONIA: Oh, yes, sir, I do.

CONRAD: What did you do?

SONIA: I went with my mother to that big café on the Eighth of October Street—the one opposite the Horse Market.

CONRAD: The Café Danube?

SONIA: Yes, sir, that's the one.

CONRAD: What time did you go there, do you remember?

SONIA: After supper it was. We were going to the cinema, because we were so happy that my mother had been given permission to see the Minister-President the next day. But first we went to the café to meet George Khitov.

CONRAD: And did you listen to the conversation between your mother and George?

SONIA: Yes, sir, of course I did. It was all about my father.

CONRAD: What did they say? Just tell us everything, as nearly as you can remember.

SONIA: Well, let me see now——

THE PROSECUTOR: She doesn't seem to have learned her lesson very well.

CONRAD: If she were reciting a lesson, she would be much more fluent, Your Lordships. Go on, Sonia.

SONIA: Well, my mother asked George if he would go with her to see the Minister-President. She said that she was afraid to go alone. She said that she thought she would be so full of emotion that she would forget what to say, and would just stand there, unable to speak, and everything would be lost. She told George that he was such a wonderful orator, that he could express himself in such a beautiful way, that perhaps the Minister-President would listen to him and would pardon my father. (*She begins to cry.*)

CONRAD (*comforting her*): Don't cry, Sonia. Remember you can help your mother best by being brave.

SONIA: Yes, I know that. I didn't mean to cry. (*She manages to control herself.*)

CONRAD: That's right. Now tell us what George said when your mother asked him to go with her.

SONIA: Well, he said—— (*She hesitates.*)

CONRAD: Yes, go on.

GEORGE: Tell the truth, Sonia.

SONIA: He said it was useless. He said that it was only self-deception to hope that the Minister-President would do anything for my father. He said that it was cruelty and not kindness that had made him grant the interview and that he had consented to see mama only so that he could torture and abuse her.

[*A scandalised murmur runs through the court-room.*]

THE PROSECUTOR (*triumphantly*): Yes! Go on!

SONIA: Well, they talked about it for quite a while——

THE PROSECUTOR: And didn't they say that if other means failed, it might be necessary to do a little shooting—that it might be a good plan to put our Leader out of the way? Didn't they say that?

SONIA: Oh, no, sir.

THE PROSECUTOR: I see. You've conveniently forgotten that part of it, haven't you?

SONIA: No, sir, they didn't say anything of the kind. (*To the JUDGES*) Really, they didn't.

CONRAD: Now listen carefully, Sonia, because this is very important. Was there anyone else present at this conversation beside your mother and George and yourself?

SONIA: Well, there were people all around, at the other tables.

CONRAD: But at your table—was there anyone else?

SONIA: Oh, no, sir.

CONRAD (*pointing to SCHNEIDER*): Look at that man sitting in the third row, between the two guards. Have you ever seen him before?

SONIA: No, sir. Is he the one who——?

CONRAD: Yes, he is Kurt Schneider, who shot the Minister-President. You are sure you have never seen him before?

SONIA: No, never.

CONRAD: And he was not present at the café table, that night, when your mother and George were having their discussion?

SONIA: No, sir; there was nobody.

CONRAD: So finally George decided not to go to the interview with your mother?

SONIA: Yes, sir.

CONRAD: And what did you do then?

SONIA: We all left the café. George went one way and we went the other—to the cinema. I did not want to go very much, because I was so unhappy about what George had said. But I did not want to disappoint my mother. I think perhaps she did not want to disappoint me. It was Charlot, in *The Lights of the City*, and we had talked for a long time about going. But we did not enjoy it very much because we were so unhappy.

CONRAD: And after the cinema, did you go back to the café?

SONIA: Oh no, we went straight home. Then, the next day——

CONRAD: Yes, we know about the next day. That's all I want to know, Sonia. (*As she starts to go*) No, don't go yet. There may be other questions.

JUDGE VLORA: Did Khitov take a pistol out of his pocket or say anything about a pistol?

SONIA: Oh, no, sir—no, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: And you are quite certain that he left the café when you did?

SONIA: Yes, Your Lordship. We said good night to him outside, on the sidewalk.

THE PROSECUTOR: Khitov and your mother are very good friends, are they not?

SONIA: Yes, sir.

THE PROSECUTOR: Did he come often to your home?

SONIA: Yes, sir; nearly every day.

THE PROSECUTOR: Oh, nearly every day. Was this before or after your father was arrested?

SONIA: Both before and after. He is an old friend of ours. He always came to see us, ever since I can remember.

THE PROSECUTOR: And did he stay late at night sometimes?

SONIA: Yes, sir.

THE PROSECUTOR: Sometimes after you went to bed?

SONIA: Yes, sir.

THE PROSECUTOR: And sometimes all night, I suppose.

LYDIA (*indignantly*): Oh!

SONIA: No, sir, not all night.

THE PROSECUTOR: How do you know?

SONIA: I—well, I know.

THE PROSECUTOR: Not very convincing. And did you sometimes see Khitov embracing your mother?

GEORGE: Swine!

JUDGE VLORA: Be careful of your remarks.

LYDIA (*springing to her feet*): Oh, Your Lordship, really——!

JUDGE SLATARSKI: What is the importance of this?

THE PROSECUTOR: I wish to show the relationship, Your Lordship——

JUDGE STURDZA: We must have all the facts in our possession.

JUDGE VLORA: Let her answer.

LYDIA: Your Lordships——!

JUDGE VLORA: Silence, if you please! (*To SONIA*) Answer the question.

CONRAD: Answer, Sonia. Did you ever see George embrace your mother?

SONIA: No. My mother is not that kind of a woman. You have no right to say such things about her.

THE PROSECUTOR: What kind of a woman?

SONIA (*embarrassed*): A woman of that sort—a woman who permits such things. You have no right to say such things about her.

THE PROSECUTOR: Answer the questions and refrain from remarks, do you understand?

SONIA: Then why do you punish her like this? She is innocent. And my father is innocent, too. Why have you condemned him to die? Why won't you set him free?

JUDGE TSANKOV: Silence! Your father is already dead.

LYDIA (*with a cry*): Oh!

SONIA (*stunned*): What did you say? My father——? Oh, no, no.

THE PROSECUTOR: Yes! He hanged himself.

GEORGE: In Christ's name, stop torturing her!

SONIA: Oh, no, no! Mama, mama! It's not true! Oh, mama, is it true?

JUDGE VLORA: She had better be removed.

CONRAD: Come along, Sonia, come with me.

[He leads the sobbing child from the tribune.]

LYDIA (*springing to her feet*): Sonia ! Darling !

JUDGE TSANKOV: Guards !

[Two GUARDS intervene between LYDIA and SONIA.]

SONIA: Mama ! Mama !

LYDIA (*trying to force the GUARDS aside*): Let me go ! Let me go !

CONRAD: Not now, Sonia, not now. Come with me.

[He leads her off, at the right. The GUARDS lead

LYDIA back to her seat. She sits with her face buried in her hands.]

THE PROSECUTOR: Obviously, Your Lordship, the testimony of this child is worthless. Seven impartial witnesses saw Schneider with Khitov and the Kuman woman in the café and not one of them remembers seeing the child.

[Throughout the latter part of the PROSECUTOR'S speech, GEORGE has been whispering to STAMBULOV.]

STAMBULOV: Your Lordships, we wish to take the testimony of the defendant Khitov on this point.

JUDGE VLORA: Very well.

[GEORGE goes to the tribune, accompanied by the guard, SRAZHIMIR.]

THE PROSECUTOR (*mockingly*): Perhaps the gentleman would like to take the oath ?

GEORGE: Yes, gladly. (*He flings up his arm.*) I swear to tell the truth, in the name of the oppressed men and women—— (*He stops as CONRAD enters, then continues*) and children of this unhappy nation.

[CONRAD resumes his seat and reassures LYDIA who questions him anxiously about SONIA.]

JUDGE TSANKOV: Reporter, are you making a careful note of all these treasonable remarks ?

THE REPORTER: Yes, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: We assume that you wish to deny having met Schneider at the café on the night of the tenth.

GEORGE: Yes, Your Lordship, I deny it.

THE PROSECUTOR: Yes, of course.

STAMBULOV: Describe, if you please, the circumstances of your meeting with Mme Kuman, in the café.

GEORGE: On Friday——

JUDGE VLORA: One moment.

[He gives some instructions to the court-clerk, who bows and exits, upstage right, to the judges' room.]

I am sending for the prisoner's examination by the State Police. Meanwhile continue.

GEORGE: On Friday, the eighth, when I returned to my room, I found Lydia's letter——

THE PROSECUTOR: *Returned from where?*

GEORGE: From a walk.

THE PROSECUTOR: At what time was it that you returned?

GEORGE: About six o'clock.

THE PROSECUTOR: The Kuman woman testified that she left the letter for you in the morning. Had you been walking all day?

GEORGE: Walking and resting at cafés. I am fond of walking.

THE PROSECUTOR: Yes, apparently. Perhaps you walked to Paris to visit the Folies Bergères.

[Laughter.]

GEORGE: Lydia had written me that an interview had been granted her——

THE PROSECUTOR: One moment! Where were you all day of the eighth?

GEORGE: What difference does it make? It was on the tenth that I met Lydia in the café, not the eighth.

THE PROSECUTOR: I want to know where you were on the eighth.

GEORGE: I have told you.

THE PROSECUTOR: Walking and sitting at cafés! Do you expect us to believe that?

GEORGE: I don't expect you to believe anything I say.

THE PROSECUTOR: Quite right.

STAMBULOV: Continue, if you please.

GEORGE: Immediately I received Lydia's letter, I wrote her to meet me at the Café Danube on Sunday at seven. I was a few minutes late in getting to the café——

THE PROSECUTOR: One moment! One moment! You go too fast. A little more consideration for my feeble intellect, if you please.

GEORGE: Certainly.

THE PROSECUTOR (*glaring at him*): You say you received the note on Friday evening at six o'clock?

GEORGE: Yes.

THE PROSECUTOR: You knew where the Kuman woman lived, of course?

GEORGE: Yes, of course.

THE PROSECUTOR: Yes, of course. You were a frequent visitor there?

GEORGE: Yes, almost every day. We are old friends.

THE PROSECUTOR: Yes, exactly—old friends. But instead of going at once to see her about this extremely important matter, you postponed the meeting for forty-eight hours?

GEORGE: Yes. It did not seem important to me

THE PROSECUTOR: What? Not important? The Minister-President had graciously consented to receive this woman and to listen to her plea for her husband's life and you did not consider it important?

GEORGE: No. I knew nothing would come of it. I am not naive enough to have believed that Vesnic would show any mercy.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Be more respectful when you speak of our Leader.

GEORGE: I regret, Your Lordship, that I cannot show respect when I do not feel it.

[A murmur runs through the court-room.]

THE PROSECUTOR: You see with what we are dealing, Your Lordships.

JUDGE TSANKOV (*grimly*): Continue.

THE PROSECUTOR: However, you knew the interview was important to her, did you not?

GEORGE: Yes.

THE PROSECUTOR: Yet you asked her to wait forty-eight hours?

GEORGE: Yes. It was the only time I could arrange.

THE PROSECUTOR: Oh, I see! You were very busy?

GEORGE: Yes.

THE PROSECUTOR: Perhaps you were going off on a walking-trip?

[Laughter.]

GEORGE: There were certain affairs that demanded my attention.

THE PROSECUTOR: What affairs?

GEORGE: I cannot answer that.

THE PROSECUTOR: You cannot tell us what it was that took so much of your time on Friday, Saturday and Sunday?

GEORGE: No.

JUDGE MURUSI: You mean you decline to tell?

GEORGE: Yes, Your Lordship, I decline.

JUDGE TSANKOV: We order you to tell.

GEORGE: I am very sorry, Your Lordship, but I must continue to refuse.

JUDGE VLORA: Are you aware that this refusal places you in a most unfavourable light?

GEORGE: I cannot help that, Your Lordship. It does not alter my determination.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Why do you insist upon this concealment?

GEORGE: Because, Your Lordship, I am not willing to win immunity for myself by exposing trusted friends to the danger of persecution.

THE PROSECUTOR: In other words, you admit that you were engaged in plotting against the Government?

GEORGE: You are wilfully confusing the issue. I am charged here with conspiring to assassinate Vesnic. I deny that. It is a fabricated charge without a vestige of evidence to support it. I have admitted that the pistol is mine, but I deny that Schneider received it from me. I deny that he was present at the conversation between Lydia and myself. The witnesses who say that he was are simply lying. They are tools of the Government who have been bribed or coerced to testify as they did. Their story is ridiculous. No person in his senses can believe that three people engaged in a plot to assassinate the head of a government would discuss the matter publicly in a crowded café. The plot is a government plot, I tell you—a conspiracy to involve Lydia and me in Schneider's exploit. I deny that I ever met Schneider or ever spoke a word to him, until I saw him here in the court-room. But I know who he is. I know something about

him and his activities. I know what his connections are and what is behind this comedy that is being staged here. Your Lordships, I charge that the Minister of Culture and Enlightenment, General Michael Rakovski—

[During GEORGE's speech, VIDIN, a guard, has entered from the right and crossed to the left, brushing against LYDIA as he passes her. LYDIA is unable to restrain an involuntary movement of surprise, but VIDIN crosses without looking at her or appearing to notice her. Suddenly JUDGE TSANKOV rises and brings his fist down on the table.]

JUDGE TSANKOV (*pointing to VIDIN*): Stop him ! Do not let him go !

[VIDIN tries to slip out but the GUARD at the left stops him and another GUARD runs over and seizes him. The court-room buzzes with excitement.]

Bring him here !

[The GUARDS drag VIDIN before the judges. Meanwhile, LYDIA hastily unfolds a slip of paper and reads it. She is so overwhelmed by the contents that she can scarcely refrain from uttering a cry.]

The woman ! Seize her ! Take that paper away from her !

[The GUARDS attempt to seize LYDIA, but she jumps down from her seat and by the time the GUARDS have reached her, she has rolled the paper into a pellet and swallowed it.]

(*Raging*): Idiots ! You'll suffer for this !
(*Thundering at VIDIN*) What was in the note you gave her ?

VIDIN (*trembling*): It's all a mistake, Your Lordship. If you please, Your Lordship, I didn't give her anything.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Make him talk ! Beat him ! Twist his arms !

[The GUARDS twist VIDIN's arms. He cries with pain.]

VIDIN: No ! No ! Let me go ! It's a mistake ! I didn't—— !

[From the judges' room comes the sound of the crashing of glass, followed by a terrific explosion, the rending of wood and a cry of anguish. Panic ensues, JUDGES, SPECTATORS, GUARDS, PRISONERS make for the doors in a frenzy of terror.]

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Two days later. The court is in session. The door leading to the judges' room has been boarded up. LYDIA is on the tribune. She is pale and weak and obviously under a terrific nervous strain. A new CLERK is at the clerk's desk.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Well ? (*LYDIA is silent.*) You refuse to answer ?

LYDIA: Yes, I refuse.

JUDGE TSANKOV: We will force you to answer.

LYDIA: You cannot. You cannot force me. I refuse. You can do whatever you like but you cannot make me answer.

[The GUARD, beside her, keeps her from falling. For two nights they have not let me sleep. I have had nothing to eat—no water. My throat is parched. I can scarcely talk. I can scarcely stand.]

JUDGE VLORA (*to the CLERK*): Give her some water.

[The CLERK pours some water for LYDIA.]

JUDGE TSANKOV: No ! Not until she has answered.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: No, no ! This is not a torture-chamber. Give her water.

JUDGE VLORA (*to the CLERK*): Yes.

[LYDIA seizes the glass and drinks thirstily.]

LYDIA: Thank you, Your Lordship, thank you. You are kind.

[*She is somewhat revived.*]

JUDGE VLORA: Mme Kuman, we wish to deal justly and humanely with you, but it is our sworn duty as judges and as citizens, to learn the truth. Two days ago there occurred here a most horrible crime. An infernal machine was hurled through the window of our consultation room. Great damage ensued. The room itself is wrecked. Valuable documents were destroyed. An honest and worthy man, Jonescu, the clerk of this court, was horribly mangled. He died this morning.

LYDIA (*covering her face*): Oh !

JUDGE VLORA: The prosecutor charges that this terroristic act was committed by persons who are in sympathy with your cause and was intended as a demonstration against this court and against the Government. He charges that you had knowledge of the intended outrage and that the note which was secretly given to you by the guard, Vidin, contained information relating to the bomb explosion. Your refusal to reveal the contents of the note gives support to his accusation. For your own good, I advise you to speak.

LYDIA: I cannot.

JUDGE VLORA: You mean you will not ?

LYDIA: Yes. (*Impulsively*) Your Lordship, I believe that you are just and free from hatred. You have treated me with kindness. I swear to you by everything I hold dear—I swear to you that I knew nothing of this act of terror, that I do not know who did it nor why. I swear to you that the note contained nothing that had the least connection with what happened—not the least.

JUDGE VLORA: Then what did it contain ?

LYDIA: I cannot answer that—I simply cannot.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Then be prepared to take the consequences.

LYDIA: I am prepared, Your Lordship. (*Half-hysterically*) It may be a welcome relief from all this.

JUDGE VLORA: That is all.

[LYDIA leaves the tribune with an effort. CONRAD rises, and he and the GUARD help her to her seat, into which she sinks, exhausted.]

THE PROSECUTOR: I hope that now Your Lordships are convinced of the guilt of the prisoners.

JUDGE VLORA: Let us proceed with the examination of the guard. (*As MALINOV, the PROSECUTOR's assistant, enters at the left*) Well, where is he? Where is Vidin?

MALINOV: It will not be possible to call him at once, Your Lordship. He seems to have fallen into a heavy sleep, from which he cannot be roused at present.

JUDGE VLORA: Is he dead?

MALINOV: Oh, no, not dead, Your Lordship. It seems to be in the nature of a coma.

GEORGE: Yes, Your Lordships, one of those famous Rakovski comas. Rakovski's thugs have beaten him into insensibility, that is all.

THE PROSECUTOR: Is this to be tolerated, Your Lordships?

JUDGE VLORA: I must warn you again to be careful.

CONRAD (*rising*): Your Lordships, may I be heard?

JUDGE VLORA: Yes. Speak.

CONRAD: Your Lordships, no one could fail to be horrified by the outrage which was committed here. I agree that no mercy should be shown to the perpetrators, and if I believed my sister to be an accomplice in the throwing of

that bomb, I would join with the prosecutor in demanding her instant conviction.

JUDGE MURUSI: That is very admirable, but quite beside the point.

CONRAD: No, Your Lordship, if you will permit me to disagree. The police have failed to find the culprit. There is no clue to his identity, nothing to show that he knew any of the defendants, or was even a sympathiser with them. Your Lordships, I ask that the prosecution be not allowed to use to its advantage an unfortunate happening with which the defendants had not the least connection, and the obvious effect of which would be to turn popular sympathy against them.

THE PROSECUTOR: This scarcely calls for a reply. The defendants are admittedly members of a terroristic organisation——

GEORGE: No !

THE PROSECUTOR: They have conspired to overthrow the Government by a systematic campaign of terror. Act one was the attempt to assassinate our Leader. When that failed, they sought to destroy the avenging forces of justice. That has failed, too. What next? When will the Government be safe from these dastardly attacks? When the heads of these criminals roll !

[Applause and cries of "Bravo!" JUDGE SLATARSKI leans forward and engages in a whispered conversation with JUDGE VLORA. BUSHATI, STAMBULOV's assistant, enters at the right, crosses to CONRAD and whispers to him. CONRAD nods and tells BUSHATI to sit down.]

JUDGE VLORA: We wish to question the defendant Khitov.

[GEORGE rises and accompanied by the guard, GLUCA, goes to the tribune.]

JUDGE VLORA: Khitov, do you know what that note contained ?

GEORGE: Yes, Your Lordship, I do.

JUDGE STURDZA: What was it?

GEORGE: I cannot answer.

JUDGE VLORA: You cannot? You mean you refuse?

GEORGE: Yes, Your Lordship, I must refuse. But I assure you that it had nothing to do with the bomb—nothing.

JUDGE MURUSI: Do you expect us to believe that?

GEORGE: I expect nothing.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Why do you refuse?

GEORGE: Because, Your Lordship, the time has not yet come to speak.

JUDGE VLORA: The time? What do you mean by that?

GEORGE: I cannot say anything further.

JUDGE VLORA: Are you fully aware of the effect that your refusal must have?

GEORGE: Yes, Your Lordship, fully.

JUDGE VLORA: And yet you persist in your refusal?

GEORGE: Yes, Your Lordship.

JUDGE VLORA: That is all.

[*The GUARD starts to lead GEORGE off.*]

GEORGE: No. Wait! I wish to be heard. I have been accused of many things—all of them false. It is now my turn to accuse.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Take your seat. You are here to answer accusations, not to make them.

GEORGE: I am falsely accused. I ask for an opportunity to answer my accusers. Your Lordships, if you are judges and not executioners, you will let me speak.

[*The JUDGES confer among themselves.*]

JUDGE VLORA: Proceed.

THE PROSECUTOR: Your Lordships, is this murderer to be permitted——

JUDGE VLORA: We shall hear what he has to say.

GEORGE (*to the REPORTER*): Take down what I say. Let my accusation be recorded. I accuse the National Government. I accuse the National Party. I accuse the man who employed both Schneider and the thrower of the bomb—General Michael Rakovski, the Minister of Culture and Enlightenment.

[A wave of excited amazement and anger sweeps the court-room.]

THE PROSECUTOR: I demand that he be removed! I demand that he be executed for treason!

JUDGE TSANKOV: Yes! Remove him!

JUDGE VLORA: No. Let him continue.

[He pounds his bell. The GUARDS try to quiet the spectators.]

Silence! Silence!

[The uproar subsides only slowly. JUDGE VLORA continues to strike his bell. The PROSECUTOR gives a sharp order to MALINOV, who exits quickly at the left.]

[When silence is restored] Khitov, what is the meaning of this fantastic accusation?

GEORGE: Your Lordship, I speak soberly and calmly. I base my charges on events that are known to all the world. Who is the sworn and relentless enemy of the People's Party? Rakovski. Who was publicly appointed by the Minister-President to stamp it out of existence? Rakovski! What was the first step? The prosecution and conviction of Alexander Kuman——

JUDGE TSANKOV: The enemy of the nation!

GEORGE: The enemy of the Vesnic government!

THE PROSECUTOR: It is the same thing.

[Loud applause.]

GEORGE: History will answer that. Who demanded the death-sentence for Alexander Kuman? Rakovski! Who presided over the Supreme Council which confirmed that sentence? Rakovski! What was the next step—when the people murmured against that judgment? It was to disrupt the followers of the People's Party by attaching to its remaining leaders the stigma of an outrageous crime. And what better than a brutal act of terror—an attempt upon the life of the Minister-President himself?

JUDGE VLORA: This is preposterous! There is not the slightest evidence——

GEORGE: The situation speaks for itself, Your Lordships. Who benefited by the act? The National Government in whose favour the assault aroused a wave of popular sympathy. Has the slightest connection been shown between the assault and the members of the People's Party? The pistol was stolen from my room by Rakovski's agents. The appointment arranged for Lydia was a trap, so that she might be present when the shot was fired. The meeting in the café is a myth, invented by Rakovski, and sworn to by his terrorised agents. And the assailant—who is he? A foreigner, a German—who scarcely understands our language. I deny that this poor scrap of humanity is a member of the People's Party. He is a tool of Rakovski—a case for a mental clinic—who has been drugged or hypnotised into a stupid acquiescence in this fabricated plot of the National Party.

[Another murmur sweeps the court-room.]

JUDGE TSANKOV: We have heard enough of this!

JUDGE MURUSI: One moment, if you please! (To GEORGE) If you will allow me, I find a slight defect in this magnificent invention. Do you suggest that the Minister-President himself was aware of this remarkable plot?

GEORGE: Naturally. It could not have been consummated otherwise.

JUDGE MURUSI: Then we are to assume that he invited the assassin into his cabinet and allowed himself to be shot and critically wounded, is that it?

[He looks about with a smirk. Derisive titters from the spectators.]

GEORGE (*calmly*): How do we know, Your Lordship, that he was shot at all?

[Angry and incredulous murmurs.]

THE PROSECUTOR: Your Lordships, how much more of this——!

JUDGE VLORA: Are you aware of what you are saying?

GEORGE: Yes, Your Lordship. There is no convincing proof here that Vesnic was wounded. Schneider fired a shot and shattered a mirror—that is undoubtedly true. But what proof is there that the Minister-President was hit? A shirt with bullet-holes in it? There are plenty of those to be found in this unhappy country. The testimony of the private secretary, Dr. Parvan? What is that worth? The bulletins of the physician, Professor Callimachi? He is Vesnic's brother-in-law and a relentless enemy of the People's Party. We have asked, again and again, for permission to have the Minister-President examined by our own doctors. Permission has been refused. Once more I ask it! Once more I ask that——

[The court-room buzzes with excitement. MALINOV enters quickly at the left.]

MALINOV: His Excellency, General Michael Rakovski!

[Everyone rises and comes to attention. RAKOVSKI strides in at the left.]

RAKOVSKI (*saluting*): Long live Vesnic!

EVERYONE (*except the PRISONERS and CONRAD*):
Long live Vesnic !

RAKOVSKI (*motioning to them to resume their seats*):
I have been asked to give my testimony. Remove this fellow from the tribune.

[*The GUARD conducts GEORGE back to his seat.*
RAKOVSKI mounts the tribune.

Well, ask your questions. I have not much time to waste on this comedy.

THE PROSECUTOR: We need not detain you long, Your Excellency. (*Pointing to GEORGE*) This Khitov—this outlaw—this terrorist has made the grotesque and incredible charge that the assassin is an acquaintance of yours—an adherent, in fact. He alleges——

RAKOVSKI: He lies ! Is that why you have brought me here—to listen to such imbecilities ? Where is he ? Which one is Schneider ? (*As the GUARDS force SCHNEIDER to his feet*) Are you Schneider ?

SCHNEIDER: Yes, Kurt Schneider.

RAKOVSKI: Be more respectful, do you hear ?

[*The GUARDS whisper to SCHNEIDER.*

SCHNEIDER (*mumbling*): Excellency. Your Excellency. Yes, Your Excellency.

RAKOVSKI: What's wrong with him ? Is he an idiot ?

MENSCH (*rising*): In my opinion, Your Excellency, a case of melancholia——

RAKOVSKI: Have I asked your opinion ? Speak when you are spoken to.

MENSCH: A thousand pardons, Your Excellency, I——

RAKOVSKI: Melancholia ! Rubbish ! He is shamming. This is a trick by which he hopes to escape punishment. Pay attention to me,

SCHNEIDER. Hold up your head or we'll find a way to make you hold it up.

[SCHNEIDER, *with an effort*, slowly raises his head.

RAKOVSKI: That's better. It is time we stopped dealing so tenderly with these murderers. Are you listening to me?

SCHNEIDER: Yes, Your Excellency. Kurt Schneider. German citizen.

RAKOVSKI: That will not save you. Did you ever see me or speak a word to me before this minute? Well, why don't you answer? What are you waiting for? You never did, did you?

SCHNEIDER: No, Your Excellency. Long live the People's Party.

RAKOVSKI: Quiet! (*He motions to the GUARDS, who force SCHNEIDER to sit down.*) Well, Your Lordships, are you satisfied? Are you convinced that I never saw the fellow before?

JUDGE TSANKOV: Perfectly, Your Excellency.

CONRAD (*rising*): Your Excellency, may I—

RAKOVSKI (*to the PROSECUTOR*): Who is this person?

THE PROSECUTOR: The American gentleman, Your Excellency, who has come here to instruct us in the administration of justice.

RAKOVSKI: Oh, so you are the American, are you? Well, let me give you a warning. We want no foreign interference here. We are capable of dealing with our affairs without assistance from Americans.

CONRAD: If Your Excellency will allow me—

RAKOVSKI: Silence! Keep your mouth closed or we'll close it for you. (*To the JUDGES, as CONRAD subsides*) Once more, I deny that I ever saw this Schneider before or that I knew of his existence until after his arrest. (*To the PROSECUTOR*) Do you wish to question me further?

THE PROSECUTOR: No, Your Excellency. I regret the necessity which——

RAKOVSKI: There was no necessity. It was a sheer waste of time to bring me here on such an errand. Since when has it become necessary to deny the grotesque inventions of murderers and traitors ?

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Your Excellency, if you will allow me——

RAKOVSKI: Certainly, Your Lordship.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Is there any reason to believe, Your Excellency, that Alexander Kuman's death was not voluntary—that perhaps some prison official in an excess of zeal——

RAKOVSKI: No, Count Slatarski, there is not. I saw the body fifteen minutes after it was cut down. Alexander Kuman strangled himself with his own neck-tie. Is that all ?

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Yes, Your Excellency.

[RAKOVSKI starts to leave.

GEORGE (*rising*): One moment, if your Excellency pleases——

[*There is a murmur throughout the court-room.*

RAKOVSKI: What ! You presume to address me ?

GEORGE: Yes, Your Excellency. When a man is facing the scaffold, he presumes to address even the Minister of Culture and Enlightenment. I wish to ask you——

RAKOVSKI: I forbid you ! I do not tolerate this—— !

GEORGE: Whether you tolerate it or not—— !

RAKOVSKI: Silence !

GEORGE: You cannot frighten me, General Rakovski ! I am not a poor sodden lump of earth that can be bullied and——

RAKOVSKI: Take him to his cell ! (*To JUDGE VLORA*) I demand that he be removed !

JUDGE VLORA: Unless you are silent, Khitov, I must——

GEORGE: I cannot be silent in the presence of the oppressors of my country.

JUDGE VLORA: Remove him !

GEORGE (*to the GUARDS*): Yes, take me to my cell. The air here is filled with poisonous lies. I prefer stone walls and chains !

RAKOVSKI (*as the GUARDS lead GEORGE away*): Wait, filthy swine ! Your hour is near. And remember that if the court does not know how to deal with you, I shall know how !

GEORGE: And the people will know how to deal with you ! (*As the GUARDS lead him through the doors at the left*) Long live the people ! Down with Vesnic !

RAKOVSKI: By those words he sentences himself to death. No man who is guilty of such an affront to our united people and their chosen leaders can be permitted to live. (*He straightens himself and gives the national salute.*) Long live Vesnic !

[*Everyone rises, salutes and repeats: "Long live Vesnic !"*]

Long live the National Government !

[*This, too, is repeated by all, except LYDIA, CONRAD and SCHNEIDER.*]

THE PROSECUTOR (*as RAKOVSKI leaves the stand*): Long live Rakovski !

[*Everyone takes up the cry, as RAKOVSKI strides rapidly off at the left. They all resume their seats. CONRAD whispers to BUSHATI, who hurries off at the right. The guard, SRAZHIMIR, returns.*]

CONRAD: Your Lordships, we wish to call

Mme Giulia Crevelli of the National Opera Company.

[There is a buzz of excitement and everyone, including the JUDGES, looks expectantly towards the right. SCHNEIDER, for the first time, begins to show some interest in the proceedings. The doors at the right open and MME CREVELLI enters. There is much excited whispering.]

This way, if you please, Mme Crevelli.

MME CREVELLI (*speaking with a marked Italian accent*): Thank you very much. (*Fully conscious of the impression she is making, she allows CONRAD to lead her to the tribune. Then, recognising JUDGE STURDZA, she smiles and extends her hand*) Ah, buon giorno, Colonel Sturdza.

JUDGE STURDZA (*rather sheepishly: kissing her hand*): Buon giorno, signora.

CONRAD: Mme Crevelli, during your engagement with the National Opera Company—

MME CREVELLI: Excuse me, I am no longer with the National Opera Company. I have finished—completely finished. Last night I destroyed my contract—tore it up in front of twenty people. And next Tuesday I am going back to Italy, thank God. I have had enough of this country. Never in my entire career have I had such treatment—never!

JUDGE MURUSI: Perhaps Mme Crevelli can be persuaded to change her mind. She has given so much pleasure—

MME CREVELLI: No, no, nothing will make me change my mind. I have my passport, my tickets—everything. You do not know how to treat artists here. Your Minister of Culture and Enlightenment!

CONRAD: That is what I wanted to ask you, Mme Crevelli. You know General Rakovski well, of course?

MME CREVELLI: Well, naturally. I am sure everyone knows that. Are we not always being photographed together—on the beach, at the race-track, in my dressing-room—goodness knows where? The man is insane on the subject of photography.

CONRAD: Was he a frequent visitor at your apartment?

MME CREVELLI: Too frequent to suit me. Morning, afternoon and night. I shall be glad to have a little privacy, I can tell you. In Italy, or France or Spain, if you yawn and stretch, a man takes the hint, but you Slavs never know when it is time to go. The Germans are like that, too.

CONRAD: And did he sometimes bring acquaintances with him?

MME CREVELLI: Yes, that was another thing. All sorts of frightful people. They turned my apartment into a public waiting-room.

CONRAD (*pointing to SCHNEIDER*): Do you recognise this man?

MME CREVELLI: Who, Kurt Schneider? Yes, of course, I recognise him.

CONRAD: Where have you seen him before?

MME CREVELLI: Where? In my apartment. He was always there. A dozen times, at least.

CONRAD: Did he come with General Rakovski?

MME CREVELLI: No, he did not come with him. They used to come separately and leave separately. It was all very secret and mysterious——

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Excuse me, Mme Crevelli——

MME CREVELLI: With pleasure, Count Slatarski.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Do we understand you to

say that General Rakovski was in the habit of meeting Schneider at your apartment?

MME CREVELLI: Yes, of course—certainly!

[THE PROSECUTOR *whispers to* MALINOV, *who exits hastily at the left.*

JUDGE VLORA: You cannot be mistaken about it?

MME CREVELLI: Mistaken? I do not understand. How could I be mistaken?

[*The JUDGES confer among themselves.*

THE PROSECUTOR: Your Lordships—

JUDGE VLORA: Yes, Dr. Bathory?

THE PROSECUTOR: While, of course, I do not wish to cast the slightest doubt upon the credibility of this talented lady—

MME CREVELLI: My credibility? What does he mean to say—that I am not telling the truth? Oh, no, no, no, I will not permit that! I have been insulted enough in this wretched country. Please remember that my husband is the cousin of Il Duce. Do you think he will permit—

JUDGE VLORA (*interrupting her*): One moment, if you please, Mme Crevelli. Continue, Dr. Bathory.

THE PROSECUTOR: It is apparent that this charming lady, for whose talents as a singer and an actress, I have the greatest admiration—

MME CREVELLI (*nodding*): Yes.

THE PROSECUTOR: It is apparent that she has some grievance against General Rakovski and that consequently—

MME CREVELLI: Yes—grievance! And with good reason, I have a grievance. I have sung in the leading opera-houses in the world. My American tour was a triumph. At Covent Garden, I—

JUDGE VLORA: One moment, if you please—

MME CREVELLI: Certainly. But he shouldn't say such things.

CONRAD: Mme Crevelli, were you ever present at the conversations between Schneider and General Rakovski?

MME CREVELLI: Certainly not. Do you think I wanted to listen to their tiresome political discussions? As soon as they began, I shut myself in my room and vocalised.

CONRAD: Do you remember Sunday, the tenth of March?

MME CREVELLI: How could I ever forget that day? It is the day the whole thing started. It is one of the blackest days in my life.

CONRAD: Will you tell us what happened?

MME CREVELLI: Yes, gladly. Perhaps when the truth is known, your public and your ministers, too, will understand that it is impossible to mix art and politics. You simply cannot do it, that is all. Well, I was to sing *Carmen* at the Sunday matinée performance. While I was dressing, Chekrezi came to my dressing-room and informed me that *Madama Butterfly* was to be added to the repertoire and that *she* was to sing it. Well, you can imagine my feelings. Chekrezi given a rôle in which I have triumphed everywhere. You all know what she looks like—a hundred and twenty kilos at the very least. And a voice—! Well, I became simply hysterical. I sent for Shishmanov—that little third-rate impresario—and I said: "What is the meaning of this? What is the meaning of this? Please be good enough to tell me what is the meaning of this?" I could get absolutely nothing out of him. He cried and tore his hair—said he had nothing to do with it. It was the Government's order, he said. Well, of course, I could not go on with the performance—they put

Gluka or somebody in—so I dressed and went home. Of course, Rakovski was there, just as I expected he would be——

CONRAD: Excuse me, but was Schneider there, also?

MME CREVELLI: Yes, he was there, too. "Rakovski," I said——

JUDGE VLORA: This was on Sunday, March tenth?

MME CREVELLI: Yes, Sunday, March tenth. I told Rakovski what had happened. What do you think? He knew all about it! He tried to put me off with some story about Slavic singers—the national spirit demanded that Slavic singers be given the preference. I said: "Rakovski, you are talking like a fool. Art is international," I said. "What has Slavic or not-Slavic to do with it? Did Puccini write the part of Cio-Cio-San for a Slav?" I said, "or did he write it for an Italian?" I told him that when I sang the part for the first time in La Scala, one of the critics said that history would record that it was Puccini's tragedy that he had not lived to hear me sing *Madama Butterfly*. Well, at last the truth came out. It seems that Spiridion Manek, who is Chekrezi's protector—if you will forgive me for mentioning such matters—it seems that he has been lending millions to the Government and there is some obligation, so, of course, you see——

JUDGE TSANKOV: There is no relevancy to all this!

JUDGE VLORA: If you please, try to keep more to the point.

MME CREVELLI: The point! That is exactly the point. You cannot mix art and politics. Well Rakovski said he would arrange it. Like a fool I believed him. He has put me off, week after week. Finally, last night, I learned that th

production of *Madama Butterfly* has been cancelled. That is how they lied to me. So I tore up my contract and Tuesday I leave for Italy. And let them try to get me back. Let them try ! Chekrezi ! Ha !

[*She laughs sardonically.*]

CONRAD : And then General Rakovski left your apartment ?

MME CREVELLI : Yes, certainly he left. I drove him out.

CONRAD : What time was that ?

MME CREVELLI : I do not know. Five—six o'clock. Perhaps later.

CONRAD : And Schneider—did he leave, too ?

MME CREVELLI : No, he did not leave. I asked him to stay and have supper with me. I had to have someone to keep me company or I should have gone mad.

CONRAD : Was he there at seven o'clock ?

MME CREVELLI : Yes, of course.

CONRAD : In other words, Your Lordships, at the very hour at which the Government's witnesses testified they saw Schneider in the café with Khitov and Mme Kuman, he was actually—

[*He is interrupted by the entrance of RAKOVSKI, who strides in at the left. Everyone rises.*]

RAKOVSKI (*striding to the centre of the room*) : What has this woman been saying ?

MME CREVELLI : This woman ! How dare you—— !

JUDGE VLORA : She has testified, Your Excellency, that you were in the habit of meeting Schneider at her apartment.

RAKOVSKI : She lies !

MME CREVELLI : What ? It is you who lie—you unspeakable—— !

RAKOVSKI: Keep quiet !

JUDGE VLORA (*striking his bell*): Please ! I must beg of you, Mme Crevelli—

MME CREVELLI: Do you think I am going to permit him—— !

JUDGE VLORA: Silence, please ! Continue, Your Excellency.

RAKOVSKI: She is simply trying to revenge herself, because the superior talents of our native Slavic singers have forced her to resign from the——

MME CREVELLI: Oh ! I will not endure this ! Superior talents ! Those squalling cats ! They would not be permitted to sweep the stage at La Scala. I shall see that Il Duce hears of this. I shall——

JUDGE VLORA (*striking his bell*): Silence ! Silence ! You must be silent ! Your Excellency, she has testified that on Sunday, March tenth, you and Schneider were in her apartment and that after your departure, Schneider remained for some time. In fact, until after seven.

RAKOVSKI: She lies ! There is not a word of truth in it !

MME CREVELLI (*venomously*): After seven ! Did you say after seven ? Do you want to know how long he remained in my apartment ? Until next morning, that's how long. How do you like that, my Romeo ?

[SCHNEIDER suddenly bursts into a peal of insane laughter.

RAKOVSKI (*bellowing with rage*): Shut up, you dog ! Shut up, or I'll wring your neck !

[RAKOVSKI strides toward SCHNEIDER, as the GUARDS try vainly to stop his laughter.

ACT III

SCENE I

Late afternoon. It is still quite light, but during the scene, the light slowly fades. The five judges are alone in the court-room: in executive session. They have put aside their official regalia. JUDGE SLATARSKI is seated in his accustomed place on the dais. JUDGE TSANKOV stands with his back to the right window. JUDGE MURUSI is seated in the second row at the left. JUDGE STURDZA sits in the prosecutor's chair. JUDGE VLORA is pacing the floor, slowly, deep in thought. The others are all more or less watching him, waiting for him to speak. Suddenly, he reaches a decision, stops and, turning toward JUDGE TSANKOV, speaks directly to him.

JUDGE VLORA: No.

JUDGE TSANKOV: And for what reason, may I ask?

JUDGE VLORA: Because, Dr. Tsankov, in my opinion, the evidence does not justify it.

JUDGE TSANKOV: There is enough evidence to behead them a dozen times.

JUDGE MURUSI: Once is usually enough.

JUDGE STURDZA (*with a laugh*): Yes, very good! They seldom recover.

JUDGE VLORA: I do not agree with you, Dr. Tsankov.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Not I.

JUDGE TSANKOV (*sneeringly*): Oh, indeed! And what evidence do you want, may I ask?

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Clear evidence of guilt before I condemn.

JUDGE TSANKOV: You doubt their guilt, Count Slatarski?

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Yes, Dr. Tsankov, I doubt it.

JUDGE TSANKOV: And I say they are guilty and they must die !

JUDGE STURDZA: They are a dangerous lot, if you ask me. Much better to put them out of the way.

JUDGE MURUSI: Yes, undoubtedly. All the same, one could wish that the patriotic zeal of our good prosecutor had been equalled by his cleverness. It is really a pity.

JUDGE TSANKOV: It is our duty to convict them.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: No.

JUDGE VLORA: I know what my duty is, Dr. Tsankov. I have been a judge now, for eighteen years. I consider it my duty to vote in accordance with my conscience.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Does your conscience permit you to absolve traitors ?

JUDGE VLORA: My conscience demands that before I vote guilty, I shall be convinced of the guilt of the accused.

JUDGE TSANKOV: A judge's first duty is to his country.

JUDGE VLORA: Excuse me, Dr. Tsankov, do you suggest that I am neglectful of my duty to my country ?

JUDGE TSANKOV: I say that the interests of the country demand that these people be put to death.

JUDGE STURDZA: Bravo !

JUDGE VLORA: It is the first time in my career that my patriotism has been questioned, Dr. Tsankov.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: And mine.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Oh, naturally, I intended no reflection upon anyone's patriotism. I was pointing out merely where our duty lies.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Dr. Tsankov, do you speak

as a judge, or as a member of the National Party?

JUDGE TSANKOV: I make no such distinction, Count Slatarski. The interests of the National Party and of the country are identical. I recognise no higher loyalty than to my party.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: And I place above all other loyalties, my honour and my duty to my God.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Honour is not a monopoly of the Slatarski family, Count.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Dr. Tsankov, I find your tone offensive. I——

JUDGE TSANKOV: And I find extremely offensive your insinuation that——

JUDGE VLORA: Gentlemen, this must stop ! This is not permissible !

[There is a knock at the door.]

JUDGE VLORA: Well ? Who is there ?

GHIERA (*off-stage at the right*): Ghiera, Your Lordship.

JUDGE STURDZA: Oh, yes, come in.

[GHIERA enters with a tray on which are a decanter of wine and a glass.]

JUDGE STURDZA: Good !

[The judges are silent, while GHIERA places the tray before JUDGE STURDZA and exits.]

JUDGE STURDZA (*meanwhile*): I regret, gentlemen, that you could not be persuaded to join me.

[He fills his glass and drinks.]

JUDGE VLORA: I must insist, gentlemen, that we proceed in a more orderly fashion. I cannot allow——

JUDGE MURUSI: If I may be permitted to offer a suggestion——

JUDGE VLORA: Certainly, Professor Murusi.

JUDGE MURUSI: It is that we consider the case of each defendant separately.

JUDGE VLORA: Yes, very good.

JUDGE TSANKOV: No. I object.

JUDGE VLORA: For what reason?

JUDGE TSANKOV: It is a case of conspiracy. The guilt of one is the guilt of all.

JUDGE STURDZA (*sipping his wine*): Yes. That's right.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: First the conspiracy must be proved.

JUDGE TSANKOV: I say it has been proved! I say——!

JUDGE VLORA: If you please——! We shall consider first the case of Schneider.

[*While he is speaking, JUDGE TSANKOV goes to the clerk's table and hastily writes a note.*]

JUDGE MURUSI: There can be no doubt of Schneider's guilt. I vote for the death penalty.

JUDGE VLORA: Colonel Sturdza?

JUDGE STURDZA: Yes. The death penalty. Think of that little German crawling into Crevelli's bed. I don't mind telling you I envy him.

JUDGE MURUSI: Well, he's not the first to lose his head over a woman.

JUDGE STURDZA (*laughing*): Yes, very good. Lose his head—that's good.

JUDGE VLORA: Dr. Tsankov, do you vote for the death penalty for Schneider?

JUDGE TSANKOV: For all three.

[*He strikes the bell on the judges' table.*]

JUDGE VLORA: Count Slatarski—the death penalty?

JUDGE SLATARSKI: For Schneider—yes.

JUDGE VLORA: I, also. Death for Schneider by a unanimous verdict. Now, we come——

[*He stops as GHEREA enters.*

GHIERA: Excuse me, did Your Lordships——

JUDGE TSANKOV: Yes. Come here.

[*GHIERA goes to JUDGE TSANKOV, who gives him the note with whispered instructions.*

GHIERA (*saluting*): Yes, Your Lordship.

JUDGE TSANKOV (*as GHEREA exits at the left*): Excuse me, gentlemen.

JUDGE VLORA: We shall now consider the case against Lydia Kuman——

JUDGE TSANKOV: Guilty! The death penalty!

JUDGE STURDZA: Yes—guilty!

JUDGE VLORA: You vote for the death penalty?

JUDGE STURDZA (*filling his glass*): Yes, absolutely. A very dangerous woman.

JUDGE VLORA: Professor Murusi?

JUDGE MURUSI: Well, gentlemen, speaking as a lawyer and as a judge, in the ordinary sense——

JUDGE SLATARSKI: You find the evidence insufficient.

JUDGE MURUSI: Well, speaking as a lawyer and as a judge, I could wish that the testimony on certain points had been a little more convincing——

JUDGE TSANKOV: On what points?

JUDGE MURUSI: Well, for example, the meeting in the café——

JUDGE TSANKOV: There were seven witnesses who testified that they saw the prisoners together—loyal citizens, every one of them.

JUDGE MURUSI: Yes, perhaps a little too loyal.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Exactly.

JUDGE TSANKOV: What do you mean by that?

JUDGE MURUSI: Oh, don't misunderstand me, Dr. Tsankov. I agree with you that we must put loyalty first of all. But, from a legal point of view—speaking strictly as a lawyer and a judge, mind you—I wish that the identification had been a little more convincing. I mean, as that fellow Khitov pointed out, it seems rather remarkable that the conspirators should have selected a café for the purpose of—

JUDGE TSANKOV: And Alexander Kuman's confession, what of that?

JUDGE SLATARSKI: A forgery!

JUDGE TSANKOV (*going toward him*): You accuse members of the National Government of forgery?

JUDGE SLATARSKI: I accuse no one. I say as a judge that the confession is a forgery. And I say that the circumstances of Kuman's suicide are most extraordinary.

JUDGE TSANKOV: What are you insinuating Count Slatarski?

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Dr. Tsankov, I am not here to answer your questions. I am a judge, not an accused person.

JUDGE TSANKOV: And I am not here to listen to slanders against our Leader and the members of—

JUDGE SLATARSKI: I have slandered no one. I demand that you withdraw your—

JUDGE VLORA: Gentlemen, come to order! (*He waits until JUDGE TSANKOV seats himself.*) If there is any more of this, I shall be compelled to impose strict rules of order. Continue, Professor Murusi.

JUDGE MURUSI: The evidence, as I have said, leaves much to be desired from the legal point of view.

JUDGE VLORA: Yes, I agree.

JUDGE MURUSI: On the other hand, as Dr. Tsankov has pointed out, ~~there~~ is also to be considered what we may call the moral point of view——

JUDGE STURDZA: Yes, exactly. The moral point of view must also be considered.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: By a moral point of view, do you mean a political point of view?

JUDGE MURUSI: Well, after all, Count Slatarski, it is very much the same thing. When all is said and done, we must admit that the highest morality is the welfare of the state. If we consider all the circumstances, we must come to the conclusion that the moral guilt of the defendants has been established. On their own admission they desire the overthrow of the National Government. They are self-confessed members of the People's Party——

JUDGE VLORA: But that is not punishable by death.

JUDGE TSANKOV (*rising*): It will be.

JUDGE VLORA: What?

JUDGE TSANKOV (*coming forward*): Gentlemen, I tell you in confidence, that at to-morrow's meeting of the Supreme Council, membership in the People's Party will be made punishable by death.

JUDGE VLORA: Impossible! It cannot be forced.

JUDGE TSANKOV: And why not—may I ask?

JUDGE VLORA: I am afraid the temper of the people will not allow it, Dr. Tsankov.

JUDGE TSANKOV: We shall know how to deal with rebellion.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: And, as judges, shall we be expected to enforce such a law?

JUDGE TSANKOV: Yes, Count Slatarski.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Then, I for one, shall refuse.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Be careful. We shall know how to deal with treason in high places, too——

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Do you accuse me of treason?

JUDGE TSANKOV: I have said what I have to say.

JUDGE VLORA: Gentlemen!

JUDGE SLATARSKI: No! I demand a withdrawal!

JUDGE VLORA: I advise you to withdraw your remarks, Dr. Tsankov.

JUDGE TSANKOV: I spoke only in general terms. Could anyone question the loyalty of a Slatarski?

JUDGE SLATARSKI: No one ever has.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Just so.

JUDGE VLORA: All of this is out of order. We are not considering the administration of future edicts.

JUDGE TSANKOV: It is a period of national emergency——!

JUDGE VLORA: One moment, if you please! The political opinions of the defendants are as repugnant to me as they are to anyone here. But, as judges, we are here to consider evidence of conspiracy. I do not find that the evidence which has been presented supports a verdict of death. In my opinion, the prosecution has not convincingly established a connection between Schneider and the other defendants. For that reason, I cannot——

JUDGE MURUSI: And what if they were charged with treason?

JUDGE VLORA: That is not the question before us.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Is this a moment for legal quibbling?

JUDGE VLORA: I do not consider it legal quibbling, Dr. Tsankov. The Government has asked specifically that we convict on the charge of conspiracy and attempted assassination. As a trained jurist, I cannot consider the evidence sufficient.

JUDGE TSANKOV (*approaching* JUDGE MURUSI): I ask Professor Murusi how he votes? I remind him that the National Government considers a death-sentence necessary!

JUDGE SLATARSKI (*rising*): That is——!

JUDGE VLORA: How do you vote, Professor Murusi?

JUDGE MURUSI: Well, in view of what I consider the moral guilt of the defendants, I think that we must regard them as constructively guilty of the crime with which they are charged——

JUDGE VLORA: Constructively guilty—what do you mean by that?

JUDGE MURUSI: Well, I mean to say, that while speaking as a lawyer and a judge, I must make certain reservations with respect to——

JUDGE TSANKOV: We want no reservations! Guilty or not guilty!

JUDGE SLATARSKI: I protest! This is coercion!

JUDGE TSANKOV: We are here to reach a decision. Guilty or not guilty, Professor Murusi?

JUDGE MURUSI: I put my country first. Guilty.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Exactly.

JUDGE STURDZA (*simultaneously*): Bravo!

JUDGE VLORA: You vote the death-sentence for Lydia Kuman?

JUDGE MURUSI: Yes, for all three.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: May I be heard?

JUDGE VLORA: If you please!

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Gentlemen, I am an old man—older by far than any of you. It is the habit of old men to turn their thoughts to the

past, and so you will forgive me, if I speak of the past—my own past and the past of my family. I claim descent from the great Constantine, who founded the Eastern Empire, laid the foundations of what is now Istanbul and glorified the Orthodox Church. For nearly two thousand years, those whose blood I have inherited have helped to make the history of Europe. We have played our part in stamping out paganism, in fighting the barbarian invaders and keeping alive through the dark centuries the culture of Greece and Rome. In later times, we have defended the liberties of our country against a hundred foreign tyrants and its religion against Islam and the Roman Church. We have been emperors, generals, bishops, poets, law-givers. We have fought for justice and for civilisation. We have been defeated more than once but our honour has never been stained. That tradition I inherited and by that tradition I have lived. For more than fifty years I have served my country, in the field and at the council-table. I have fought against the Turk and against the Austrian. Three sons are buried in soldiers' graves. I am an old man, now—too old perhaps. But while there is yet the breath of life in me, I shall continue to uphold my honour and the honour of my country. Gentlemen, this is dishonour, this is iniquity! To connive at the death of an innocent man and woman because—

JUDGE TSANKOV (*who stands listening grimly, arms folded*): They are not innocent. They are traitors.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: I say they are innocent. I say that no matter how abhorrent their political opinions, they are innocent of the crime with which they are charged. I say that for us, as judges, to condemn them to death, is murder—an outrageous act, which God will punish and history condemn. I shall not be a party to it.

I shall not be the tool or the slave of those, who for their political salvation are willing to prostitute the law and make a mockery of justice.

[During his last words, RAKOVSKI enters quietly at the left. JUDGE SLATARSKI stops short in astonishment. The others, except JUDGE TSANKOV, are amazed, too. They all rise.]

RAKOVSKI: Count Slatarski, are these words directed against the Government?

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Are you aware, General Rakovski, that the members of the High Court of Justice are in executive session?

RAKOVSKI (*sardonically*): I am here at the urgent invitation of one of the members of the court.

JUDGE VLORA: You acted in excess of your authority, Dr. Tsankov.

JUDGE TSANKOV: I do not consider that I did.

JUDGE VLORA: But I do. You forget that I am the President of this court and that my authority——

RAKOVSKI (*impatently*): This is no moment to argue points of etiquette. I have come here——

JUDGE VLORA: Excuse me, Your Excellency, but this is unprecedented. I say it with the utmost respect, unprecedented. I have been a member of this court for eighteen years and never before has a Governmental Minister——

RAKOVSKI: If you please! I tell you that this is not the time to consider niceties of procedure, but to——

JUDGE SLATARSKI: This is no question of procedure. It is——

RAKOVSKI: Excuse me, Count Slatarski, I say that——

JUDGE SLATARSKI: No! It is inexcusable. I——

RAKOVSKI: Hear me, gentlemen! It is an emergency, I tell you—a national emergency. Am I to be heard or am I not?

JUDGE VLORA: Well—in view of what you say—naturally, in unusual circumstances, one must make allowances— Proceed, if you please.

RAKOVSKI: Thank you. Be seated, please.

[*They resume their seats.*]

I am informed, gentlemen, that there is some difference of opinion among you.

JUDGE VLORA: Dr. Tsankov, this is most improper !

JUDGE TSANKOV: I am not concerned with these minor questions of taste.

RAKOVSKI: Dr. Tsankov is a patriot.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Of a rather recent vintage.

JUDGE TSANKOV: I demand a withdrawal of—

JUDGE VLORA: Order, gentlemen ! This is disgraceful ! In all my years—

[JUDGE TSANKOV *subsides*.]

RAKOVSKI: If you please, gentlemen—all of you ! I ask for your serious attention. I have come to tell you something of the utmost importance. There is only one possible verdict in this case—a unanimous verdict of guilty.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Yes !

JUDGE SLATARSKI (*simultaneously*): No.

JUDGE VLORA: What you ask is impossible, Your Excellency.

RAKOVSKI: Why ?

JUDGE VLORA: Because the evidence will not support such a verdict.

RAKOVSKI: I do not agree. But even if you are right, the verdict must nevertheless be guilty.

JUDGE VLORA: But—this is—forgive me, Your Excellency, but this is unheard of. Surely you do not mean that even if we believe the defendants to be innocent—

JUDGE SLATARSKI: You come here to ask us to violate our oaths as judges?

RAKOVSKI: I ask you to find them guilty. They are guilty of treason—does any of you presume to question that? If so——

JUDGE SLATARSKI: That is not the charge on which they are being tried. It has not been proven that——

RAKOVSKI: It has been proven that they are members of the People's Party. Let me tell you something that you do not know. I have just left a meeting of the Supreme Council at which it was decreed that membership in the People's Party is punishable by death. Our Leader is now preparing the edict.

JUDGE VLORA: But a decree which did not exist——

JUDGE SLATARSKI: They must be re-tried on a new charge—after their acquittal.

JUDGE TSANKOV: You see! They will sacrifice their country for the sake of a legal point.

JUDGE VLORA: We do not forget our sworn duty as judges, Dr. Tsankov, whatever you may——

RAKOVSKI: If you please! There will be no new trial. There will be no acquittal. There must and will be a verdict of guilty on the charge of attempted assassination.

JUDGE VLORA: Must?

RAKOVSKI: Yes, must.

JUDGE VLORA: Are we to understand, Your Excellency, that you have come here to dictate to us what our verdict shall be?

RAKOVSKI: I have come here to appeal to your patriotism and to point out where your duty lies.

JUDGE VLORA: Our duty as judges lies in the fulfilment of——

RAKOVSKI: A national emergency exists. The

fate of the National Government hangs in the balance. I shall tell you something, gentlemen. This afternoon, there was a disturbance in the Voivodov quarter—a demonstration in favour of the prisoners. The police were ordered to fire upon the crowd. They refused. Do you see what that means? Do you see the results of your delay and vacillation! Rumours have spread that the court is divided. The agents of the People's Party are stirring up the mobs. There is only one answer to that—the conviction and immediate execution of the defendants. A unanimous verdict of guilty will quiet the mob spirit. As soon as the verdict is announced, we shall arrest every known member of the People's Party. The lists are ready—over two thousand names. The treason trials will begin to-morrow. In forty-eight hours, the leadership of the revolt will be crushed and the Government saved. But we cannot act until we have the verdict of guilty—until these defendants have been convicted of attempting to murder the Minister-President. Give us that and we will strike. If we do not strike at once, the situation may be out of hand. Now you know where your duty lies. Fail to perform it and I shall not be responsible for the consequences.

[There is a long moment of silence. JUDGE VLORA rises and turns away, deeply agitated.]

Well, gentlemen, can the Government rely upon you?

JUDGE STURDZA: Naturally, Your Excellency.

JUDGE MURUSI: In view of this extraordinary crisis—

JUDGE SLATARSKI: My duty is plainer than ever. I shall vote for an acquittal.

RAKOVSKI: I must warn you, Count Slatarski that the Government will regard such an action as treason. Not even your name will save you.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: In my family, Your Excellency, it has always been said that it is not enough to know how to live. One must also know how to die.

RAKOVSKI: It is my understanding of your procedure, gentlemen, that when there is only one dissenting voice, the verdict must be announced as unanimous. Is that correct, Dr. Vlora?

JUDGE VLORA: Yes.

RAKOVSKI: Then?

JUDGE VLORA: You place the responsibility upon my shoulders?

RAKOVSKI: Necessarily.

JUDGE VLORA: I ask you for time to consider.

RAKOVSKI: Impossible. The verdict must be reached to-night. The gravity of the situation does not permit us to delay.

JUDGE VLORA: I—it is not possible, as a judge, to—

RAKOVSKI: Gentlemen, there is one other fact that I shall reveal to you. But under a pledge of the strictest secrecy. Have I that pledge?

JUDGE TSANKOV: Yes.

JUDGE MURUSI: Certainly, Your Excellency.

JUDGE STURDZA (*crossing himself*): In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

RAKOVSKI: Dr. Vlora?

JUDGE VLORA: Yes.

RAKOVSKI: Count Slatarski, have I your pledge of secrecy?

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Yes.

RAKOVSKI: Very well, then. On the honour of every one of you. Gentlemen, Alexander Kuman did not commit suicide. He is alive and at liberty.

[*This is like a bombshell. All, including JUDGE TSANKOV, utter exclamations of astonishment.*]

JUDGE VLORA: But——!

RAKOVSKI: He escaped with the connivance of a prison-guard, the day before the trial began. We have been unable to find him, but it is he who is responsible for these riots—he who is stirring up the crowds. You see now what must be done. His wife and his lieutenant must not be permitted to live another twenty-four hours.

JUDGE VLORA: That is——! Does—do the defendants know that Kuman is alive?

RAKOVSKI: Yes.

JUDGE MURUSI: So that's what was in the note!

RAKOVSKI: Yes, just so. We finally persuaded the guard Vidin to talk. He confessed that the note contained information of Kuman's escape. I can show you his confession. Shortly after making it, he died—of pneumonia.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: General Rakovski, you testified here that you saw Kuman's dead body, *fifteen minutes after it had been cut down.*

RAKOVSKI: Do you think I would be such a fool as to testify in public that he had escaped—that there was disloyalty among the prison-guards? Do you know what the effect of that would have been? It was necessary for me to say what I did. Besides, I did not take the oath.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Is this the new national honour which we are asked to uphold? Is this what our country, with its history of sacrifice and glory, has come to?

RAKOVSKI: We are not living among the romantic sentimentalities of the nineteenth century, Count Slatarski. We have put aside all these decadent philosophies of liberalism and Christian ethics. We have swept away the weak-kneed and womanish doctrines of democracy, and have rediscovered our strength and our unity.

JUDGE STURDZA: Bravo !

JUDGE TSANKOV (*simultaneously, saluting*): Long live Vesnic and the National Government !

JUDGE SLATARSKI: We are living in an age of shame—of shame and spiritual anarchy. Our national honour lies broken and besmirched. It is time that the truth were made known. I shall spend my few remaining days proclaiming that truth——

RAKOVSKI (*sneeringly*): Remember your sacred pledge of secrecy, Count Slatarski.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: I——

[*He bows his head.*]

RAKOVSKI: And now, Dr. Vlora.

JUDGE VLORA: Your Excellency, I—my life has been devoted to my profession. I have tried to live like an honourable man. What will the world say if I—— ?

RAKOVSKI: Your duty is to your country.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Dr. Vlora, in the name of God and of your country, I implore you not to lend yourself to this crime. Cast your vote for truth and justice. And if it results in the fall of this vicious government, then I say so much the better.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Treason !

JUDGE SLATARSKI: I repeat, so much the better. And I wish I had the strength to send my words around the world.

RAKOVSKI (*silencing JUDGE TSANKOV with a look*): Dr. Vlora, the Government awaits your decision.

JUDGE VLORA: If only the evidence—in view of what we have heard—what you have just told us, we do not know what to believe. We do not even know, for certain, that the Minister-President was shot.

RAKOVSKI: Oh, you consider the evidence on that point weak?

JUDGE VLORA: Well, your Excellency, considering—

RAKOVSKI: I understand. And what if you had confirmation?

JUDGE VLORA: Confirmation?

RAKOVSKI: Yes. What if the Minister-President himself were to testify in open court—were to corroborate the story of the shooting?

JUDGE VLORA: Well, in that case, naturally—

RAKOVSKI: That would satisfy you?

JUDGE VLORA: It would scarcely be possible to question the word of the Leader himself.

RAKOVSKI: Good. When do you sit?

JUDGE VLORA: At eight o'clock.

RAKOVSKI: I give you my word that the Leader will testify. Thank you, gentlemen. I shall leave you now to resume your deliberations. Dr. Vlora, a grateful nation will honour you for preserving it from barbarism and anarchy.

[JUDGE VLORA *does not answer.*

RAKOVSKI: And the Government will know how to reward your services, too, Count Slatarski.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: The sooner, the better. I have lived too long.

RAKOVSKI: I agree.

[*He exits at the left.*

JUDGE MURUSI (*looking at his watch*): It is nearly seven. Will you join me at dinner, gentlemen?

JUDGE STURDZA: With pleasure.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Thank you.

JUDGE MURUSI: I'm afraid we haven't time for more than a cutlet and a bottle of wine.

JUDGE STURDZA: Yes, this damned trial has ruined my regimen.

[JUDGE MURUSI and JUDGE STURDZA exit at the left. JUDGE TSANKOV follows them to the door, then stops as JUDGE SLATARSKI and JUDGE VLORA remain motionless.

JUDGE TSANKOV: After you, Dr. Vlora.

JUDGE VLORA (*automatically*): Thank you.

[*He walks mechanically to the door.*

JUDGE SLATARSKI (*despairingly*): Dr. Vlora !

[JUDGE VLORA walks out as though he had not heard.

JUDGE SLATARSKI's head droops.

JUDGE TSANKOV: Happy dreams, Your Lordship.

[*He exits. JUDGE SLATARSKI sits motionless, in the fading light.*

CURTAIN

SCENE II

An hour later. The heavy curtains are drawn across the windows and the lights are on. At the rise of the curtain, the room is empty. The guard, GHEREA, enters at the left, carrying books and papers. He looks about, surprised to find no one there, then goes to the judges' table and arranges the papers. A moment later, SRAZHIMIR emerges noiselessly from behind the window-curtains at the left.

SRAZHIMIR: Anton !

GHEREA (*turning*): Oh, there you are ! Where did you come from ?

SRAZHIMIR: I was opening the window and arranging things. Is he here ?

GHEREA: Not yet. Pekmesi is on the look-out for him. He'll bring him here the minute he arrives.

SRAZHIMIR: Maybe we're fools to take a chance

like this. If anything goes wrong, you know what will happen to us, don't you ?

GHAREA : What's the matter with you, you louse ? Getting scared ?

SRAZHIMIR : No, I'm not scared. Only—well, I can't help thinking about Vidin. Is it true that they—— ?

GHAREA : Yes, of course, it's true. They tortured him until he confessed and then they beat him to death.

SRAZHIMIR : The dirty bastards !

GHAREA : We'll make them pay for it. Unless a lot of swine like you turn yellow.

SRAZHIMIR : I'm not turning yellow. Only if something should go wrong, God help us.

GHAREA : Nothing's going to go wrong. The boys are all with us. The police, too. Did you hear what happened this afternoon ?

SRAZHIMIR : No—what ?

GHAREA : Well, it was over in the Voivodov quarter. Some professor from the University started making a speech. He said that the people demanded that Khitov and Mme Kuman be freed. The crowd began cheering. Then, of course, the police came hurrying up. " Fire ! " says the lieutenant. But all he could get the boys to do was fire in the air over the heads of the crowd.

SRAZHIMIR (*excitedly*) : Yes ? Good for them ! Then what happened ?

GHAREA : The lieutenant sent out a hurry call for a detachment of cavalry and, of course, they broke it up, the dirty rats. They did plenty of damage to the crowd, too. Just try having a cavalry horse step on you, some time.

SRAZHIMIR : Yes, I've seen it. And what about the boys that refused to shoot ? What will they do to them ?

GHEREA: If you ask me, they won't do anything to them. Not the way things are now. Do you know what some of the people in the crowd were yelling?

SRAZHIMIR: What?

GHEREA: They were yelling: "Down with Vesnic!"

SRAZHIMIR: Be careful!

[*The door at the right opens and MAREK, a captain of police, enters.*]

THE GUARDS (*saluting*): Long live Vesnic!

MAREK (*saluting*): Long live Vesnic! I'm looking for a certain priest—a Father Sebastian. Have you seen anything of him?

GHEREA: We're expecting him, sir.

MAREK: Oh, you know him, do you?

GHEREA: Yes, sir. You can trust us, sir. We were just talking about that meeting this afternoon in——

[*The guard, PEKMESI, enters at the left.*]

PEKMESI (*as he enters*): Is everything——? (*He stops and salutes as he sees MAREK.*) Long live Vesnic!

MAREK: I am Captain Marek, in command of the police.

PEKMESI (*saluting*): Oh, yes, sir. (*Calling*) This way, Father! Come right along this way.

[*An orthodox PRIEST enters at the left. He has a long, grey beard and wears a robe that touches the ground.*]

THE PRIEST (*whiningly, as he enters*): God's blessing on you, my children. God's blessing on you.

MAREK (*saluting*): Marek!

[*The PRIEST salutes, goes over to him and seizes him warmly by the hand.*]

THE PRIEST (*dropping his whining tone*): Welcome,

Captain Marek. Welcome in the name of the people.

MAREK: I hope I shall serve them well under your leadership. But we must act quickly now.

THE PRIEST: Yes. Which is the balcony?

SRAZHIMIR (*pointing to the left*): That one, sir. I've opened the window. And there's plenty of space between the window and the curtains.

THE PRIEST: Good. Which of you is Gherea?

GHEREA: I am, sir.

THE PRIEST: I have some questions to ask you. Pekmesi, go back to your post, and warn me, if—

PEKMESI: Yes, sir.

[He salutes and exits at the left.]

THE PRIEST (*to SRAZHIMIR*): What is your name?

SRAZHIMIR: Srazhimir.

THE PRIEST: How many guards are there between here and the west gate?

SRAZHIMIR: Four, sir.

THE PRIEST: Can they all be trusted?

GHEREA: Yes, sir, every man of them.

THE PRIEST (*to SRAZHIMIR*): Then they are to say that I passed through this way and out of the west gate. Do you understand?

SRAZHIMIR: Yes, sir. Shall I go now?

THE PRIEST: Yes, at once.

[SRAZHIMIR salutes and exits at the right.]

And your men, Captain Marek?

MAREK: I've placed picked men at the west gate. They have the same instructions.

THE PRIEST: Good. Now, Gherea, tell me quickly what happened this evening.

GHEREA: They were in here—all five of them Judge Vlora and Judge Slatarski——

THE PRIEST: Yes. I know. Then Tsankov sent you with a note to Rakovski?

GHEREA: Yes, sir, and when I told the secretary the letter was from Judge Tsankov, he took it right in. And it wasn't two minutes before Rakovski came rushing over here. Well, when they saw him come in——

THE PRIEST: Never mind that. You heard Rakovski promise that Vesnic would testify?

GHEREA: Yes, sir. They were all shouting and I was just outside the door. He said, "I give you my word that the Minister-President will testify to-night." Then, the next thing——

SRAZHIMIR (*entering at the right*): Everything is arranged, sir.

THE PRIEST: Then, I'd better——

GHEREA: Yes, sir. They'll be starting to come in, any minute now.

THE PRIEST: What are your instructions from Rakovski, Captain?

MAREK: Police lines drawn two hundred metres from the palace. No one allowed through without a pass signed by him personally. Fire at the first sign of disorder.

THE PRIEST: Where will you be stationed?

MAREK: In the archway, just across from those windows. You'll give the signal with a flash-lamp?

THE PRIEST (*taking a flash-lamp from beneath his robe*): Yes. Three times like this. You'll be sure to see it.

MAREK: Yes, I can't fail to. With the curtains drawn, the balcony is in complete darkness.

THE PRIEST (*extending his hand*): Then——

[*They shake hands.*]

MAREK: What if something should go wrong?

THE PRIEST: Nothing will go wrong. (*Putting his hand on MAREK's shoulder*) You are a brave man, Captain Marek. The people will not forget you.

MAREK: I'm proud of your confidence in me.

THE PRIEST (*to the GUARDS*): Nor you either, my friends.

[SRAZHIMIR and GHEREA salute.

PEKMESI (*entering hastily at the left*): Lieutenant Nekludov! (*To the PRIEST*) Quick!

THE PRIEST (*softly; saluting*): Long live 'the people!

[*He disappears quickly behind the curtains at the left. At the same moment, NEKLUDOV, a young lieutenant of the guards, enters quickly at the left.*

NEKLUDOV (*seizing PEKMESI by the throat*): What do you mean by rushing in here and shouting "Lieutenant Nekludov"? Well, you dog, what do you mean by it?

PEKMESI: Excuse me, sir, but the captain—

MAREK (*calmly*): Yes, I have been waiting to see you, Lieutenant.

NEKLUDOV (*releasing PEKMESI*): Oh, I— (*Saluting*) Long live Vesnic!

MAREK (*saluting*): Long live Vesnic! Captain Marek in command of the police. I wanted to make sure, Lieutenant—

NEKLUDOV: Excuse me, Captain, but I am looking for a certain priest, who— Has any body seen him?

GHIERA: Do you mean Father Sebastian, sir?

NEKLUDOV: Yes, that's the one. Have you seen him?

GHIERA: Why, he came to the prison, Someone told him that Vidin was dying pneumonia and he came to give the poor fellow

the last sacrament. But, of course, Vidin had already passed on.

[*He crosses himself.*]

PEKMESI: That pneumonia finishes you off before you——

NEKLUDOV: Shut up! Go back to your post.

PEKMESI: Yes, sir.

[*He salutes and exits at the left.*]

NEKLUDOV: Has anyone seen this priest since he left the prison?

MAREK: Why, yes, Lieutenant. He passed through here, just a few minutes ago.

NEKLUDOV: Through here? Which way did he——?

MAREK: Yes, he didn't seem to know which way he was going or what he was doing. I've known the old fellow a long time, and I think he's a little—— (*He taps his head.*) So I took the liberty to instruct your men to pass him out through the west gate. I hope I haven't——

NEKLUDOV: Through the west gate? How long ago——?

[*He starts to the door.*]

MAREK: Nothing to worry about, Lieutenant. He's quite a harmless old fool. No need to——

NEKLUDOV (*nervously*): Excuse me, Captain, but I have reason to believe that——

[*As he goes toward the door at the right, BASSARABA enters, reading a newspaper.*]

(*Drawing his revolver*) Who are you? What do you want here? Well, speak!

BASSARABA (*speechless with fright and falling on his knees*): I—I—— Don't shoot, sir, in God's name!

LAZHIMIR: Excuse me, Lieutenant, but he's one of the witnesses.

NEKLUDOV: Oh, all right, get up.

BASSARABA (*still trembling*): Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Long live Vesnic! It might have been a terrible tragedy.

[*He seats himself in the last row at the right.*]

NEKLUDOV: I want every pass examined carefully, do you understand?

SRAZHIMIR: Yes, Lieutenant.

NEKLUDOV: I'll hold every man personally responsible if anything goes wrong.

MAREK: I'll go with you, Lieutenant. I came here to make sure that your men have received instructions as to what to do in case—— •

[*They exit together at the right. GHEREA exits at the left. SRAZHIMIR remains on duty at the right and examines the passes of the spectators as they enter. The LAWYERS, CLERKS, and COURT ATTENDANTS enter at the left and the court-room fills rapidly. LYDIA and GEORGE enter at the left in the custody of the guards, GHEREA, JORGA and GLUCA. LYDIA's eyes stray involuntarily toward the curtains at the left, then she looks quickly away. But every now and then she glances in the direction of the curtains again.*]

PEKMESI (*entering at the left*): Their Lordships, the members of the High Court of Justice.

[*Everyone rises and stands at attention as the JUDGES enter and take their places on the dais.*]

JUDGE VLORA (*saluting*): Long live Vesnic!

EVERYONE (*saluting*): Long live Vesnic!

JUDGE VLORA (*saluting*): Long live the National Government!

EVERYONE (*saluting*): Long live the National Government!

[*The JUDGES seat themselves and the others resume their seats.*]

JUDGE VLORA (*to MENSCH*): Dr. Mensch, I have your communication to the effect that the:

prisoner Schneider is physically unable to attend this session. You understand, of course, that it is impossible to delay the proceedings, particularly since Schneider seems, in any case, unable to comprehend what is being said.

MENSCH: Quite so, Your Lordship. I quite agree. I had no wish to delay the proceedings. I merely wished to call Your Lordships' attention—

JUDGE VLORA: Yes, very properly. (*Consulting his notes*) We shall continue now with the pleas of counsel and also of the prisoners, if they wish to be heard. Of the time allotted, there remains one hour for the defence and two hours for the prosecution.

THE PROSECUTOR: I shall not want more than half an hour, Your Lordship. It is a simple case.

CONRAD: I shall take an additional five or ten minutes, Your Lordship. The rest of the time will be used by Khitov and Mme Kuman.

JUDGE VLORA: Very well. Proceed.

CONRAD: Your Lordships, I shall not refer again to the evidence in the case. We have already analysed it in great detail. We have shown that the defendants, George Khitov and Lydia Kuman, are wholly innocent of the crime with which they are charged, and that there has never been the slightest connection between them and Schneider. I have nothing to add to what my colleagues have already said. But what I do wish to speak of is what the world will say if—

JUDGE TSANKOV: We are not interested in that. It does not concern us.

CONRAD: Excuse me, Your Lordship, if I presume to disagree. I think that it concerns us very deeply—that it must concern everyone who truly loves his country. I count myself as one of those. In the land of my adoption, I have not

forgotten my native country, any more than a son, who has wandered far from home, forgets the mother who gave him birth. And so I speak, not as a stranger, but as one of you. That is why I ask you to consider the opinion of the world. For, Your Lordships, the eyes of the world are upon us. Ten thousand newspapers in a hundred countries have carried daily reports of this case. It has been discussed—is being discussed at this very moment in palaces and slums, in factories and on farms, not only along the Danube and the shores of the Adriatic, but on the Volga, the Mississippi, the slopes of the Alps and the borders of the Pacific. In every land, men and women, with taut nerves, await your verdict and unite their voices to ask that this High Court of Justice affirm by its verdict their passionate belief that these defendants are innocent. I implore you not to turn a deaf ear to that universal cry. To adjudge these defendants innocent is to proclaim to the world that we take our place among those nations who put justice and honour above political considerations; that in our land, truth and the right still prevail. To condemn them, to find them guilty, is to acknowledge that justice is dead, that liberty no longer exists; it is to invite the indignation and the approbrium of the civilised world. Your Lordships, in the name of justice, in the name of truth, in the name of our national honour, in the name of humanity, I ask for an acquittal.

[He resumes his seat.]

THE PROSECUTOR: I hope that Your Lordships will accept this foreign challenge. I hope that the verdict will make it clear to this American and to all other arrogant foreigners that we want none of their interference, and that we are capable of keeping our own house in order, without their advice and assistance.

[Applause from the spectators.]

[*The PROSECUTOR whispers to PARVAN, who exits at the right with the guard, ZOGU.*]

JUDGE VLORA: We shall now hear the defendant Khitov.

[*GEORGE rises and addresses the judges.*]

GEORGE: Your Lordships, I have little hope or expectation that what I have to say will influence your judgment or alter your decision——

JUDGE MURUSI: Then why take the trouble to say it?

[*Titters from the spectators.*]

GEORGE: Because, Your Lordship, I agree with our young friend that the importance of this trial is not confined to the narrow borders of our country, nor to the few moments within which we live. I consider it an event not only of world-wide interest but of historic significance, not because we count as individuals, but because of what we represent. That is why I address myself not only to this court, but to the great world audience and beyond and through it to the minds and hearts of posterity——

LYDIA: Bravo !

THE PROSECUTOR: Your Lordships, this is entirely out of order. Is the prisoner to be permitted to use this court of justice as a forum for his inflammatory orations?

JUDGE VLORA: He has been allotted time to speak. He has the right to be heard.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Yes, let us, at least, preserve the forms of a judicial proceeding.

JUDGE TSANKOV: That is a most improper remark, Count Slatarski. I demand——

JUDGE VLORA: If you please ! (*To GEORGE*) Continue.

JUDGE STURDZA: But be careful what you say.

GEORGE: Why, Your Lordship? Why should

I be careful ? Could caution save me now, even if I were cowardly enough to think only of my own safety ? No ! A man who may never be heard again, must not be careful. He must be bold—he must speak while he can. Shall I waste my precious time discussing evidence ? There is no evidence—only a fantastic concoction of lies. You call this proceeding a trial ? From the beginning its meaning has been clear to everyone. It is a crude and clumsy political manoeuvre—an attempt, at one stroke, to turn the rising tide of popular discontent into a wave of sentimental sympathy for Vesnic and to deprive the people of their leaders. How could this be accomplished ? Simply by implicating us—the leaders of the People's Party—in an attempted assassination of Vesnic. We have all understood it perfectly. Not one of us here has been taken in for an instant. But, unfortunately, Your Lordships, unfortunately for Vesnic and his government, the people have not been taken in either. The trick has been performed, but it has deceived no one. The tide is rising higher, the voices of the people grow louder. Your Lordships, it is not we who are on trial here—Lydia Kuman and I. No, far from it ! It is Vesnic who is on trial—Vesnic and his collection of puppets that calls itself a government. I speak to you not as a defendant, not as a prisoner, but as a prosecuting officer before the bar of justice of the world.

THE PROSECUTOR: I demand that he be stopped.

JUDGE SLATARSKI: No. Let him speak !

JUDGE VLORA: Continue.

GEORGE: Four years ago, Grigori Vesnic seized power and made himself dictator. I stand here to-night, as spokesman for our oppressed people, to charge Grigori Vesnic, in their name, with his crimes. I charge him with tyranny, cruelty,

ruthlessness and wholesale slaughter, with annihilating the liberties of the people and the institutions of justice. I charge him with destroying the precious heritage of our science and our art and with sending into exile the flower of our intellectual life. I charge him with sowing the seeds of terror and hatred. I charge him with racial and religious fanaticism, with deliberately endangering the peace of the world. I charge him with the murder of the thousands of innocent men and women who have perished on the scaffold, in the torture chamber and in the concentration camps. I charge him with——

[PARVAN enters hastily at the right.]

PARVAN: Your Lordships, His Excellency, the Minister-President, our Leader Grigori Vesnic.

[Everyone rises instantly and stands at attention. The door at the right opens and VESNIC enters in a wheel-chair, pushed by the guard, ZOGU.]

Long live Vesnic !

EVERYONE (*saluting*): Long live Vesnic !

GEORGE: Vesnic, in the name of the people, I demand your abdication !

[A scandalised murmur runs through the room.]

VESNIC: Silence ! Take your seats, all of you.

[He waits until they have all resumed their seats. Then, just as he is about to speak, a long-drawn whistle is heard, distant but clear. Everyone is startled.]

What does that signify? (*To PARVAN*) Find out.

PARVAN: Yes, Your Excellency. (*He goes hurriedly toward the windows at the left. LYDIA restrains herself with difficulty.*)

CHEREA (*rising*): Excuse me, sir. That window does not open. The handle is broken.

[PARVAN goes quickly to the other window, disappearing behind the curtains.]

VESNIC: Help me to the tribune !

[ZOGU and the PROSECUTOR help him out of the chair and to the tribune, then resume their places.

PARVAN appears from behind the curtains.

PARVAN: Everything seems in order, Your Excellency.

VESNIC: Send someone to investigate. (To MALINOV) You ! Go !

MALINOV: Yes, Your Excellency !

[He hurries off at the right. VESNIC holds the rail of the tribune. PARVAN resumes his place.

VESNIC: What does this mean ? Why is this disgraceful scene permitted ? Why am I asked to come here ? Have you forgotten that you are men ? Since when do loyal citizens remain silent while traitors speak ? Does no one answer me ?

JUDGE TSANKOV: Your Excellency, there are certain members of this court——

JUDGE VLORA: Your Excellency, the performance of our duty as judges——

VESNIC: You have only one duty—your duty to the National Government. I permit no deviation from that duty. Is that understood ?

JUDGE STURDZA: Yes, Your Excellency.

JUDGE MURUSI: Perfectly, Your Excellency.

VESNIC: Then why am I asked to come here ?

JUDGE VLORA: We hoped, Your Excellency, that if Your Excellency would deign to honour us by testifying as to——

VESNIC: Haven't you heard the testimony of the witnesses—my secretary and my physician and all the others ? What more do you want ?

JUDGE VLORA: Merely your corroboration, Your Excellency.

VESNIC: And for this I am dragged here ! To confirm what everyone already knows. I must

warn you, gentlemen, that if our courts do not know how to deal with their country's enemies, the Government will be compelled to find more effective means of procuring justice. There is no place in our state for weakness and wavering. You want confirmation? Well, then, you have it. I confirm what has already been testified to and I demand an immediate sentence of death for these assassins.

JUDGE VLORA: Then Your Excellency is thoroughly convinced of the guilt of—

VESNIC: Must I say it a thousand times! Is there anyone here who dares to doubt their guilt? Is there anyone who presumes to question that this was a plot of the People's Party, prearranged by the traitor, Alexander Kuman?

[The curtains at the left open and ALEXANDER KUMAN steps out, divested of his priest's disguise.]

There is a murmur of amazement.

ALEXANDER: You lie, Vesnic!

LYDIA: Alexander!

[GEORGE goes to ALEXANDER and clasps his hand warmly.]

THE PROSECUTOR (*simultaneously*): Kuman!

[There is growing excitement as ALEXANDER comes forward.]

VESNIC: Arrest him! Arrest him, do you hear? *[He looks about in terror as the GUARDS sit motionless with folded arms.]*

ALEXANDER: There is your answer, Vesnic. Arrest me, if you dare!

VESNIC (*to PARVAN*): Kill him! *[PARVAN draws revolver and levels it at ALEXANDER.]*

LYDIA (*throwing her arms about him*): Alexander!

[He throws her quickly behind him. Before PARVAN can fire, the guard, ZOGU, seizes his arm and takes the pistol from him.]

ALEXANDER: Vesnic, I have come here to demand your surrender !

VESNIC (*hoarsely*) : Kill him ! I order him killed. Is there no one here—— (*He looks about him in a frenzy of fear.*)

JUDGE TSANKOV: Yes, Your Excellency. (*He rises and draws a revolver.* JUDGE SLATARSKI *rises and seizes the revolver from JUDGE TSANKOV.* VESNIC *tries to take the revolver from JUDGE SLATARSKI who fires point-blank at him.* VESNIC *falls dead at the foot of the dais.*)

JUDGE SLATARSKI: Down with tyranny ! Long live the people ! (*He turns the revolver against himself, fires and falls, amid intense excitement.*)

CURTAIN

BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON

Dorothy L. Sayers and M. St. Clare Byrne

BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON

A Detective Comedy in Three Acts

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Allen, 32, Shaftesbury Avenue, W.1 (in association with Pearn,
Pollinger & Higham Ltd.)*

CHARACTERS

(in the order of their appearance)

MR. PUFFETT

BUNTER

MRS. RUDDLE

HARRIET (LADY PETER WIMSEY)

LORD PETER WIMSEY

MISS TWITTERTON

FRANK CRUTCHLEY

REV. SIMON GOODACRE

MR. MACBRIDE

CONSTABLE SELLON

SUPERINTENDENT KIRK

GEORGE

BILL

SCENE

The Living-room at Talboys

ACT I

a.m. on a Wednesday morning in October

ACT II

1.30 p.m. the same day

ACT III

SCENE I: Thursday evening

SCENE II: Friday morning

This play was first presented by Mr. Anmer Hall at the Comedy Theatre, London, on Wednesday, 16th December, 1936, with the following cast:

<i>Mr. Puffett</i>	ROGER MAXWELL
<i>Bunter</i>	NORMAN V. NORMAN
<i>Mrs. Ruddie</i>	NELLIE BOWMAN
<i>Harriet</i>	VERONICA TURLEIGH
<i>Lord Peter Wimsey</i>	DENNIS ARUNDELL
<i>Miss Twitterton</i>	CHRISTINE SILVER
<i>Frank Crutchley</i>	BARRIE LIVESEY
<i>Rev. Simon Goodacre</i>	MARTIN LEWIS
<i>Mr. MacBride</i>	JOHN GLYN-JONES
<i>Constable Sellon</i>	ALASTAIR MACINTYRE
<i>Superintendent Kirk</i>	DAVID HAWTHORNE
<i>George</i>	MAURICE DENHAM
<i>Bill</i>	EDWIN CHARLES

Producer: BEATRICE WILSON

AUTHORS' NOTE

Busman's Honeymoon is an attempt to express in dramatic terms the essential formula that distinguishes the true "detective problem" from the "thriller" on the one hand and the "psychological crime-story" on the other. That formula is the "fair-play rule," which during the past ten or twenty years has been slowly hammered out for the detective novel, and is now established and accepted by all serious lovers of this specialised art-form. The rule is, "that every clue must be shown at the same time to the public and to the detective," so that both have an equal chance to solve the problem. The public must not be told the secret of the crime beforehand; nor must the detective acquire any private information which he does not immediately impart to the public.

It was necessary to invent a technique to express this formula, since the novelist's approach by argument and explanation is clearly unsuited to the stage. For the First Act, in which most of the major clues are introduced, the method chosen is that of *visual* presentation. The clues as to Means are displayed, silently but conspicuously, down-stage, while at the same time the animated discussion of trivialities up-stage holds the ear and divides the attention of the audience. The producer's task is thus to play, as it were, two independent tunes concurrently, concentrating upon inessentials in order to disguise, without concealing, the essentials of the plot-structure.

In the Second Act, the method, while still contrapuntal, is slightly varied. While the inquiry is ostensibly directed to Motive, the information actually conveyed to the audience chiefly concerns Opportunity, or the lack of it. Here, Superintendent Kirk's unwavering *canto fermo* is contrasted with the freely moving descant played by Peter, who hovers continually

above the action, sometimes in concord and sometimes in passing discord with the set theme. The producer may note the visual symbolism, whereby Kirk remains throughout firmly planted in his chair, while Peter wanders about the stage, darting in upon the problem from all angles.

In Act III, Scene I, which for the purposes of the plot establishes Motive, the attention is held by yet another theme. This, introduced in the First Act and kept moving by occasional passages in Act II, here emerges into prominence. The human and emotional aspects of the situation, as it affects the private lives of the characters concerned, become the main source of interest. An effort is here made to do for the detective play what has already been achieved for the detective novel—that is, to combine it with the comedy of manners, and so bring it back into the main line of English dramatic tradition. In this scene, the masks are dropped all round: along farcical-comedy lines by Bunter; along tragi-comedy lines by Crutchley and Miss Twitterton; and along romantic-comedy lines by Peter and Harriet, the complete sincerity of whose emotion is the touchstone by which all the rest of the action must be tested.

In the final scene, both the disguised and the ostensible clues extracted from the previous scenes are presented afresh in a visual reconstruction to solve the problem on purely theatrical lines; and at the same time the emotional elements are brought into harmony. The construction is thus that of a Three-part Fugue, moving contrapuntally to an ordered resolution.

The authors would be the last persons to claim that in this highly experimental play they have wholly succeeded in solving their own problem and providing a perfect dramatic formula for the presentation of the "fair-play"

rule, and the emotional elements of the detective plot. They suggest, however, that the future development of the detective play may lie in this direction, being convinced that neither sensation without thought nor argument without emotion can ever provide the basis for any permanent artistic structure.

ACT I

The living-room at Talboys.

The time is 9.30 on a fine morning early in October. Autumn sunshine streams pleasantly through the window. The scene is the living-room of a small Tudor farmhouse, partly panelled; oak-beamed ceiling; large projecting hearth and chimney-breast, back centre. The left-hand corner of the room is taken up by latticed casements, with a broad window-ledge, and a window-seat. A door R. back leads to entrance porch, kitchen premises, etc.: a door L. down-stage leads to a staircase. The furniture of the room is entirely shrouded in dust-sheets, beneath which one may dimly perceive the outlines of two settles forming ingle-seats, the left-hand one only half the size of the right; a sideboard against the right-hand wall, an armchair down-stage L., a whatnot above the door on the left wall, and a round table that has been pushed up into the window-corner. At the down-stage end of the right-hand settle there is a radio cabinet. Over the cabinet hangs an unwholesome-looking cactus in a brass pot; there is another hanging in the window, and other repulsive plants disfigure the window-ledges. Three aspidistras, removed from the shrouded sideboard, make a forlorn group down-stage R. The floor is covered with newspapers and dust-sheets. A painted drainpipe, holding pampas grass and bulrushes, stands to the right of the fireplace.

The scene is empty except for the hinder end of MR. PUFFETT, visible beneath the chimney drape. He is unsuccessfully endeavouring to get his sweep's brush up the chimney and encouraging himself with strange and muffled cries and snorts. He is clad in many sweaters and coats. He wears a bowler hat.

Enter, from staircase L., BUNTER, carrying a tray, on which are the ruins of a substantial breakfast for two. He stands for a moment watching MR. PUFFETT with an expression of cold criticism. Eventually MR. PUFFETT, emerging from the chimney drape, begins to withdraw his apparatus, rod by rod.

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BUNTER: Are we making any progress, Mr. Puffett?

PUFFETT: All the trouble with this chimney, Mr. Bunter, is sut.

BUNTER: So we inferred. (*Sets tray down on table in window.*)

PUFFETT: That's what it is: corroded sut. If it wasn't for the sut, it'd draw beautiful; no chimney can't draw if it's full of corroded sut like this here chimney is; you can't ask it.

BUNTER: I don't ask it. I ask *you* to get it clear. We should be glad to know why Mr. Noakes couldn't have had the chimneys swept before we came.

PUFFETT (*with dark meaning*): Ah!

BUNTER: We gave him ample notice. To find the house upside down and the chimneys smoking like volcanoes is not an auspicious commencement to a honeymoon.

PUFFETT: Oh! It's a honeymoon, is it? (Mr. PUFFETT *stands up and faces* BUNTER.)

BUNTER: It is, Mr. Puffett. We were only married yesterday.

PUFFETT: 'Oo was married? (*Takes off his bowler, comes down to radio, and puts hat down carefully.*)

BUNTER: Lord Peter Wimsey and Lady Peter.

PUFFETT: Oh! Lord Peter Wimsey was married, was he? Now from your way of putting it, I thought *you* was the 'appy bridegroom!

BUNTER: I am wedded to my service, Mr. Puffett. And I may say it is highly disagreeable to the feelings of a gentleman's personal man when his gentleman is smoked out on his wedding night. I assure you, Mr. Puffett, there wasn't a place fit to sit down in.

PUFFETT: I believe you !

BUNTER: We were compelled to retire to bed.

PUFFETT: Ah, well, I've known worse things 'appen to 'oneymoon couples.

BUNTER (*with a touch of asperity*): Do you see any prospect of getting that chimney clear ?

PUFFETT: Well, now, Mr. Bunter, I put it to you to just take a look at this here sut. (*Picks up a large lump from hearth.*) 'Ard as a crock, that sut is—corroded 'ard.

[*Enter MRS. RUDDLE with broom and duster.*]

BUNTER: But Mr. Noakes has been living here himself, hasn't he ? Didn't he complain of the chimneys ? (*Briskly*) No use coming in here yet, Mrs. Ruddle.

MRS. RUDDLE: 'Mornin', Mr. Puffett. 'Ow's Jinny ?

PUFFETT: Not so bad, considerin'. (*To BUNTER*) Complain, Mr. Bunter ? Complainin's one thing; sweepin's another ! Complaints cost nothing. I don't suppose there's a man in Pagglesham wot's ever had his brushes up this chimney. Ain't that right, Mrs. Ruddle ?

MRS. RUDDLE: That's right, Mr. Puffett. 'Arf the time, Mr. Noakes won't 'ave no fire. Jest sets over that nasty, stinkin' oil-stove.

BUNTER: Well, I wish someone could inform us where this gentleman's got to.

MRS. RUDDLE: I'm sure I can't tell you, Mr. Bunter, without he's over at Broxford. When I come up last Thursday morning to do for 'im same as usual and finds the 'ouse shut up, I says, " There ! if he ain't gone over to Broxford without tellin' me." And 'im owin' me for the week, too, wot's more.

PUFFETT: You don't say, Mrs. Ruddle.

MRS. RUDDLE: And not the first time neither.

BUNTER: Does he often go over to Broxford?

PUFFETT (*getting down on knees again*): Got his business there. Wireless.

MRS. RUDDLE: And 'e's got a bedroom over the shop. Often away nights, 'e is.

BUNTER: Does he never leave you the key when he goes?

MRS. RUDDLE: Not 'im. (*Sniffs.*) Afraid I'll pinch something, I suppose. Nobody can't get in, without they go over to Miss Twitterton's—that's 'is niece over at Pagford—and gets the other key from her—same as you did.

PUFFETT: Ah, 'e's a careful man is Mr. Noakes. Maybe 'e's got reason to be.

MRS. RUDDLE: And wot might you mean by that insinundo, Mr. Puffett?

PUFFETT: Nothing, ma. But 'e ain't never found that there note-case, did 'e?

MRS. RUDDLE: I'm sure it ain't nothin' to do with me if 'e did nor yet if 'e didn't.

PUFFETT (*to MRS. RUDDLE*): 'Oo said it was? All the same, that's when 'e 'ad the locks put on they windows. Ah, 'e's careful. And what you might call pre-cise.

BUNTER: Didn't he tell you that he'd sold the house, and that we should be coming down?

MRS. RUDDLE: Not a word, Mr. Bunter, 'e didn't. You could a-knocked me down with a feather when you came round last night. And the pore lady and gentleman on their 'oney-moon, too. It was a mercy I 'ad the clean sheets aired and ready. Such a nice young lady. And 'is lordship—such a lovely gentleman! They must have been rare put about. Never mind! We'll soon 'ave everything straight for the 'appy pair.

[HARRIET passes window.]

BUNTER: Here comes her ladyship. You'd better get on with the washing-up.

MRS. RUDDLE (*taking up tray*): That's right. (*Peeping under the dish-covers*) Taking their vittles well? Ah! bless their dear 'carts! I likes to see a young couple eat 'earty.

BUNTER: Oh! *And* the lamps, Mrs. Ruddle. They all need new wicks.

MRS. RUDDLE: 'E never uses 'em nowadays. Candles! (*Exit* MRS. RUDDLE.)

BUNTER: So we discovered last night. Well, now, Mr. Puffett. That chimney's got to be cleared.

PUFFETT: I asks you, Mr. Bunter, is it fair to a man or his rods——? (*Enter* HARRIET *from garden, with some bronze chrysanthemums. She does not appear to be unduly depressed by the events of the preceding night.*)

HARRIET: The garden's been quite well kept anyway—— (*Sees* MR. PUFFETT) Oh, Bunter! You've got hold of the sweep? How splendid!

BUNTER: Yes, my lady. I went out early and ascertained that Mr. Puffett would be willing to oblige. (*MR. PUFFETT turns round and struggles up from his knees.*)

HARRIET: How *very* kind of you, Mr. Puffett. We had a dreadful time with it last night. (*She extends a friendly hand. PUFFETT looks at it, then at his own; extracts a clean red cotton handkerchief from his trouser pocket, shakes it open, and drapes it across his palm before shaking her hand warmly.*)

PUFFETT: Always willing to oblige a lady. Though sweeping ain't rightly my job, except to oblige. Still, being in the building trade thirty-five years, I may say I know a good bit about chimneys.

HARRIET: I'm sure you know *all* about them.

PUFFETT: Well, m'lady, if anybody can get the corroded sut out of this chimney-pot, I make bold to say I can. It's the power I puts be'ind it.

BUNTER: As I understand it from Mr. Puffett, my lady, it's the actual pot that's choked—no structural defect in the stack.

PUFFETT: I'm a goin' to try it with the rods alone, without the brush. (*Stripping off top sweater*) Maybe with my power be'ind it, we'll be able to get the rod through the sut. If not, we'll 'ave to get the ladders.

HARRIET: Heavens, Mr. Puffett! Not a major operation?

BUNTER: No, access by the roof, my lady.

[PUFFETT strips off another sweater and returns to the chimney.]

HARRIET (*calling up staircase L.*): Peter!

PETER (*above*): Hullo!

BUNTER: If you will excuse me, my lady, I think Mrs. Ruddle may require a little direction.

HARRIET: All right, Bunter. (MR. PUFFETT *dives in*. As BUNTER goes, she calls after him) Oh, and, Bunter, just see if you can find me a vase for these (*setting down flowers*).

BUNTER: Yes, my lady.

HARRIET (*again calling up the staircase*): Peter, darling! The sweep's come!

PETER (*off*): Oh, frabjous day! I am coming, my own, my sweep! (*He patters briskly down, and enters, displaying the expansive goodwill proper to a gentleman who has passed his matrimonial examination with credit to himself, and has been fortified with ham and eggs.*) Harriet! You have a genius for saying the right thing! All my life I have waited to hear those exquisite words, "Peter, darling!"

The sweep's come ! " We are married, by God ! We are married ! (*He takes both her hands and kisses them, while MR. PUFFETT tactfully retires into the chimney.*) The sweep is here ! I crushed down my rising hopes. I said, No—it is a thunder-storm, a small earthquake, or at most a destitute cow dying by inches in the chimney. I dared not court disappointment. It is so long since I was taken into anybody's confidence about a sweep. Bunter always smuggles him in, for fear of inconveniencing my lordship.

HARRIET: " Your lordship " seems to take wonderfully well to this primitive country life.

PETER: Not so primitive neither ! As Mrs. Ruddle so delicately explained last night, " Down the little stair everything is modern ! "

HARRIET: Yes. And we've got a gigantic cistern, which lives in a cupboard to itself. You open the door and fall down two steps, bump your head, and bring up with your chin on the ball-cock.

PETER: My God, woman, you haven't put the ball-cock out of order ? Do you realise that country life is entirely conditioned by the ball-cock in the cistern and the kitchen boiler ?

HARRIET: I do—but I didn't think you would.

PETER: What I don't know about insanitary plumbing isn't worth knowing. In the old family shack in the nineties we had a hundred and fifty bedrooms, perpetual house-parties, every drop of water pumped by hand, two bathrooms, and all the rest hip-baths.

HARRIET: Oh, Peter ! I'd adore to see you in a hip-bath.

PETER: Madam, you're fully licensed. Why didn't you pop in just now, if you like these low-comedy turns ?

HARRIET: Peter ! You don't mean to say Bunter gave you a hip-bath ? It's gross favouritism ! He fobbed me off with one of those flat, shallow saucers.

PETER: Oh, dear, oh, dear ! (*Laughing*) All this makes me feel twenty years younger. All the same, I intend to have a word with Mr. Noakes when I get hold of him.

HARRIET: I remember he always was a horrid, stingy, mean man. And oh, Peter ! how he has spoilt this lovely room. It used to be so pretty with the old farmhouse furniture. It belonged to the sweetest Darby and Joan couple, and when we came to see them they gave us strawberries and seedy cake.

PETER: He's left the settles—that's something. (*Takes pipe from pocket.*) Bunter ! (*calling off*).

HARRIET: And the funny old American clock. But just look at that mirror. (*Enter BUNTER.*) And the painted drainpipe with the pampas grass !

PETER: What have I done with my tobacco-pouch, Bunter ?

BUNTER: The smoking requisites, my lord, are temporarily deposited in the whatnot. (*Begins to cross to it as he speaks. PETER follows him across the stage.*)

PETER: The what ?

BUNTER: Not, my lord. (*Turns as he answers.*)

PETER: Not what ?

BUNTER: In here, my lord. (*Lifts dust-sheets from the atrocious bamboo whatnot, and produces pouch.*)

PETER (*looking at the whatnot*): You're right, Bunter.—Definitely Not. Not just after breakfast. (*BUNTER veils the whatnot again, and exit, back.*)

HARRIET: And *must* we maintain five aspidistras?

PETER: Hush! Never speak disrespectfully of the aspidistra. Something awful will come down the chimney and *get* you—boo! . . . Oh, my God! look at that bristling horror! (*Indicates cactus over wireless set.*)

HARRIET: Some people would pay pounds for a fine cactus like that.

PETER: They must have very little imagination. It makes me wonder whether I've shaved this morning. Have I?

HARRIET: M'm. Like satin. Thank goodness we haven't bought his grisly furniture.

PETER: Yes; it's a damn' shame, spoiling this noble old place with all this muck. (*Moves down-stage R. MR. PUFFETT emerges for a moment.*)

HARRIET: Do you like the house, Peter?

PETER: Yes. It's beautiful. . . . It's like a lovely body inhabited by an evil spirit. And I don't mean only the furniture. I've taken a dislike to the absentee Noakes. I've a fancy he's up to no good, and that the house will be glad to be rid of him.

HARRIET: I believe it hates him. I'm sure he's starved and insulted and ill-treated it. (*Awful wheezing and sneezing from MR. PUFFETT.*)

PETER: I say (*clutching her arm*), he's making alarming noises. D'you think he's all right? Not going to have a fit or anything?

HARRIET: It's the power he's putting behind it—or so he says.

PETER: I see. Great strength rings the bell. (*To PUFFETT*) Excuse me a moment. I say—

PUFFETT (*turns round on knees*): Good morning, your lordship. Trust I sees you well.

PETER: Thank you. We are, so to speak, in the pink. But the chimney doesn't seem to be feeling as well as it might. Shortness of wind, or something.

PUFFETT: The fault's in the pot, me lord, like I was saying to your lady.

PETER: The pot? Oh, yes, the twiddley bit at the top. Like a bottle-neck on a by-pass. Even a Tudor chimney winds somewhere safe to pot (*sketching shape with his hands*).

PUFFETT: Ah, that's just it. *If* we 'ad the Tooder pot we'd be all right. But Mr. Noakes, 'e tuk down some on 'em and sold 'em to make sundials.

HARRIET: Sold them for sundials!

PUFFETT: Yerss. Catch-penny, I calls it. That's 'im all over. And these 'ere fiddling modern pots wot 'e put on ain't no good. They'll choke tight in a month. (*Impressively*) It don't matter 'ow big the bottle is, if you can't get at the cork.

PETER (*examining rods*): I see you've brought your own corkscrew. There's a thing to give a man a thirst—what?

PUFFETT: Thank you kindly, me lord. (*Wipes mouth.*) When the job's done, I won't say no. (*He strips off another sweater.*)

HARRIET: I'd no idea chimney-sweeping was such a he-man's job. I thought you just put up the brush—

PETER: And down came the soot.

PUFFETT: It's all accordin'. There's a power o' difference in sut. There's the loose sut in the bends; that don't 'urt. *It's the corroded sut in the pot*, which it ain't fair to a man nor his rods.

[*Enter BUNTER with an atrocious vase.*]

BUNTER: I regret, my lady, this is all I can discover.

HARRIET (*taking it from him*): Heavens, Bunter!

BUNTER: Yes, my lady. (PETER *takes the vase from HARRIET. Miss TWITTERTON is seen passing the window.*)

PUFFETT: Mr. Noakes won that at the flower show. You know, me lady, two throws a penny! (*He illustrates.*)

[HARRIET *crosses L. for flowers*; PETER *follows her with vase.*

PETER (*as he crosses*): What you rings you keeps.

HARRIET (*as he sets vase down*): Was that what the parson was muttering to you yesterday, when I thought you'd lost the ring?

PETER: Quite possibly. I only recovered consciousness in the vestry! I say, Mr.— (*Stops—looks at HARRIET.*)

HARRIET: Mr. Puffett—

PETER: Mr. Puffett, I don't know how you started your honeymoon—

PUFFETT (*scrambling up, dusting his knees*): Went to 'Erne Bay, me lord, me and the missus did—

PETER: Why didn't we think of that? (*Puts his arm round HARRIET's waist.*) There was a top-hole murder committed at Herne Bay.

HARRIET: Yes! George Joseph Smith and his first Bride in the Bath! So appropriate! If you're thinking of trying your hand—

PETER: No, my dear; that calls for a full-sized bath. Ah, well, we didn't go to Herne Bay; we came here, just in time for dinner—

BUNTER: Miss Twitterton, my lady. (Miss TWITTERTON *hurries in. She is small, rather like an eager sparrow.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, may I come in? *Good morning, Lady Peter. I do hope I'm not disturbing you. (HARRIET scrambles to her feet.) Good morning, Lord Peter. (HARRIET'S "how nice of you" is drowned in the spate of Miss TWITTERTON'S twitter.) I had to run over and see how you were getting on. I hope you passed a comfortable night (looking anxiously from one to the other. PUFFETT nudges her).*

PETER (*gravely*): Thank you, Miss Twitterton. Parts of it were excellent.

MISS TWITTERTON: I always think the *bed* is the important thing. (*PUFFETT catches PETER'S eye, and explodes in the background.*) But what is the matter? And what's Mr. Puffett doing here? *Don't* say the chimney has been smoking again! It always was a tiresome chimney.

PUFFETT: There's no call to abuse the chimney. It's nothin' but sut. (*He plunges into it again.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, I do *wish* I had known that you were coming, Lady Peter. I'd have had everything properly seen to. I can't *think* why Uncle didn't tell me about it. He *always* lets me know when he's going away. And to think of his selling you the house without telling anybody or seeing to anything—it's too dreadful! Are you sure he knew you were coming?

PETER: He must have known. We complete purchase last week, and sent him the cheque and I wrote to him at the same time saying, it was convenient, we'd like to come down on the following Tuesday—

HARRIET: That was yesterday.

PETER: —just for a week or so, if he could let have the use of the furniture. He wrote back let's see . . .

HARRIET: Last Wednesday—a week ago to-day.

PETER: He said it would be quite all right, and he'd see that everything was ready for us.

MISS TWITTERTON: Well, he never said a *word* to me. Not one word. (CRUTCHLEY is seen passing the window.) Oh! there's Frank Crutchley! Uncle may have said something to him. He does the garden for Uncle, you know. He comes every Wednesday. He may know where Uncle is. Do you mind if I ask him to come in? He's a very superior young man . . . and such a good worker. . . .

HARRIET: Of course. Please do, Miss Twitterton. (*Kneels and begins putting flowers in vase.*)

MISS TWITTERTON (*calling through window*): Frank! Frank! We can't find Uncle!

CRUTCHLEY: Can't *find* him?

MISS TWITTERTON: No—he isn't here and we can't think what's become of him.

CRUTCHLEY (*at window*): Never said anything to me, Miss Twitterton.

MISS TWITTERTON: Was he here when you came last Wednesday?

CRUTCHLEY: Yes, he was here all right.

PETER: You'd better come in, Crutchley.

CRUTCHLEY: Right, sir. (*Vanishes.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: I do hope you won't mind my mentioning it, but I'm sure Frank would be very glad to go on doing the garden for you, like he did for Uncle.

HARRIET: He's kept it awfully well. I thought it looked lovely this morning.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh! I *am* so glad. It *would* be so nice if he could go on with it. I'm *sure* you'd like him——

[*Enter CRUTCHLEY, rather good-looking, about*

thirty. He is obviously surprised at the scene and personages which meet his eye.

PETER: Come in. (CRUTCHLEY *shuts the door, and comes down-stage, taking it all in.*) A little unexpected, and all that, what?

CRUTCHLEY (*smiling*): Well, yes, sir. I see it's the chimney.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, Frank! We want to ask you about Uncle. We don't know where he is. Did he tell you he'd sold the house and that this lady and gentleman were coming?

CRUTCHLEY: No.

MISS TWITTERTON: I can't understand it, Frank, can you? It isn't *like* Uncle.

CRUTCHLEY: Been over to the shop?

MISS TWITTERTON: No, I don't think anyone has been there yet. There hasn't been time. (HARRIET *gets up with vase and puts it on table in window.*)

PETER: Is Mr. Noakes generally here on Wednesday when you come, Crutchley?

CRUTCHLEY: Well, depends. Not always, sir.

MISS TWITTERTON: Frank—it's his lordship. You must say "my lord."

CRUTCHLEY: Oh! Matter o' fact, I did expect to find 'im here this mornin'. That's why I come up to the house first. (MISS TWITTERTON *mouths an anguished "came" at him.*)

PETER: You mean he told you he'd be here?

CRUTCHLEY: He said he'd let me have back some money of mine he'd had in his business. Said he'd let me have it to-day.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, Frank! You've been worrying Uncle *again*.

PETER: You say he arranged to give it you back to-day?

CRUTCHLEY: Yes, sir—me lord. It was a matter o' forty pounds, as he got me to put into his wireless business. I asked him for it last week, and he palavered as usual; said he didn't keep sums like that in the house, puttin' me off——

MISS TWITTERTON: But of *course* he didn't——

CRUTCHLEY: However, I stuck to it as I must have it, and at last he said he'd let me have it to-day, as he'd got some money comin' in. And I said, "I hope you do, and, if you don't, I'll have the law on you."

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, Frank, you shouldn't have!

HARRIET (*aside to PETER*): The money for the house!

PETER: Yes. (*To CRUTCHLEY*) Well, and what did Mr. Noakes say to that?

CRUTCHLEY: He said, "Your forty pounds is safe enough in the business, where you put it." And I said, "Maybe, but I want it for my new garridge——"

MISS TWITTERTON: Frank's been saving up for a long time to start his own garage——

CRUTCHLEY: He wanted to argue, but I said to him, "I'll see my money Wednesday, or I'll have the law on you." That's what I said. And I ain't seen him since.

PETER: We'll run over to Broxford presently and hunt him up. And in the meantime, Crutchley, we shall want a bit of gardening done, so you'd better carry on as usual.

CRUTCHLEY: Very good, my lord. Shall I come Wednesdays, same as usual? Five shillings Mr. Noakes give me by the day.

PETER: Right. Oh, and, by the way, do you know anything about running an electric light plant?

CRUTCHLEY: Yes, my lord. There's one at the garridge where I work.

PETER: We shall have to put one in here, first thing——

MISS TWITTERTON: I'm sure Frank would be able to look after it for you. He knows everything about machinery.

PETER: Good. We'll talk it over presently. Meanwhile, carry on.

CRUTCHLEY: Thank you, my lord. (*Exit back.*)

PETER (*moving up to window*): Well, Miss Twitterton, I'm sorry, but we don't seem much forrader, do we? (*Glancing out*) Hullo! Who's our visitor? (*Retreats hastily*) I hope to God it isn't one of those infernal reporters——

HARRIET (*moving quickly up and looking out*): My dear! It's a vicar! He's coming to make a call.

PETER: Harriet, this is almost too good to be true! I collect vicars! (*He joins HARRIET at the window.*) If you can keep things at this pitch of excitement I think I shall go on being married to you. (*Looking out over her shoulder*) This is a very well-grown specimen, six-foot-four or thereabouts, short-sighted, a great gardener, musical, smokes a pipe——

MISS TWITTERTON: Good gracious! Do you know Mr. Goodacre?

PETER: —untidy; with a wife who does her best on a small stipend; a product of one of our older seats of learning—1890 vintage—Oxford, at a guess; but not, I fancy, Keble; though as high in his views as the parish allows him to be.

HARRIET: He'll hear you. (*Draws him away from window.*) To the best of my knowledge and belief you are right. But why the strictly limited High Church views? Oh, Miss Twitterton do sit down. (*She pushes back dust-sheets from arm-chair down-stage L.* MISS TWITTERTON *perches on the edge of it.*)

PETER: The Roman bib and tucker point the upward way. You know my methods, Watson. But, though we heard the church clock strike eight, there was no bell for a daily celebration.

MISS TWITTERTON (*completely bewildered, but clinging to the one item she has disentangled*): It's choir practice to-night. Always on Wednesdays, you know.

[MR. GOODACRE is seen passing the window.]

PETER: As you say, Miss Twitterton, Wednesdays always is choir practice. *Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.*

MISS TWITTERTON: I beg your pardon?

PETER: I too, Miss Twitterton, though you might not think it, have bawled Maunder and Garrett down the neck of the blacksmith's daughter singing in the village choir, and have proclaimed the company of the spearmen to be scattered abroad among the beasts of the people, with a little fancy pointing of my own.

PUFFETT (*suddenly emerging from chimney*): Ah! That's an orkerd one, is the beasts of the people.

PETER: Harriet, your honeymoon house is a great success. I *am* twenty years younger. (*He strikes an attitude and declaims*):

Give me just a country cottage where the soot
of ages falls,
And to crown a perfect morning, look, an
English vicar calls!

[*They all look expectantly at the door.*]

HARRIET: He's thought better of it! And I don't wonder! Miss Twitterton will think we're both quite mad; and Mr. Puffett knows it already.

PUFFETT: Oh, no, me lady. Not mad. Just 'appy. I knows the feeling.

PETER: As man to man, Puffett, I thank you for

those kind and sympathetic words. (*Enter BUNTER.*)

BUNTER: The Rev. Simon Goodacre. (*Enter the REV. SIMON GOODACRE. He is a very tall, thin, scholarly old gentleman, wearing a light grey suit with a dog-collar and Roman vest.*)

GOODACRE: I fear I am intruding—er—I understand from—er—

PETER: Good morning, sir. My name's Wimsey. My wife. (*HARRIET shakes hands.*)

HARRIET: Good morning, Mr. Goodacre. I'm afraid we're all at sixes and sevens.

GOODACRE: How do you do? Good morning, Miss Twitterton.

MISS TWITTERTON (*in a mournful chirp*): Good morning, Mr. Goodacre.

GOODACRE (*turns to PETER, noticing his club sweater*): An Oxford man, I see.

PETER: Balliol, sir.

GOODACRE: Magdalen. (*They shake hands on it.*) Bless me! Wimsey of Balliol. Now what is it I—?

PETER: Cricket, perhaps. (*Enter CRUTCHLEY, in shirt-sleeves and gardener's apron, carrying step-ladder and watering-can.*)

GOODACRE: Yes. Ye—yes. Cricket and—

HARRIET: Won't you sit down, Mr. Goodacre? (*She uncovers the left-hand settle.*)

GOODACRE: Oh, thank you, thank you. (*He sits.*) Yes. Cricket and— (*He pauses.*)

PETER: Getting into the veteran class now, I'm afraid.

GOODACRE: —something else, I feel sure. . . . Wimsey of Balliol. . . . (*Then it comes to him.*) Not Lord Peter Wimsey? (*While this and the ensuing conversation continues, CRUTCHLEY gets up the*

ladder, waters the cactus, spills some water, wipes the pot, etc.)

PETER: An ill-favoured label, but my own.

GOODACRE: Of course, of course ! Lord Peter Wimsey—cricket and crime ! Dear me, this is an honour. My wife and I were reading a paragraph in the paper only the other day—most interesting—about your detective experiences.

MISS TWITTERTON (*gasps*) : Detective !

PETER: My wife's in the same line of business. She writes detective stories.

GOODACRE: I hope you haven't come to detect anything in Pagglesham. (HARRIET *sits down opposite* GOODACRE.)

PETER: No, I sincerely hope not. As a matter of fact, my wife and I came here with the idea of passing a peaceful honeymoon.

GOODACRE: Indeed ! I hope you will allow me to say, God bless you and make you very happy.

HARRIET: Thank you very much. We are—very happy.

GOODACRE: Now I wonder why you chose Pagglesham ?

PETER: My wife was brought up in this part of the country, and knew this old house when she was a child.

HARRIET: I don't suppose you remember me. I'm Harriet Vane.

GOODACRE: Little Harriet Vane ! My dear ! Of course I recollect you and your parents very well. So you remembered the old place ? (CRUTCHLEY *crosses to window with watering-can and does the pots.*)

HARRIET: I always loved Talboys. I used to come over and have tea with dear old Mr. and Mrs. Bateson when they had it. (PUFFETT *joins CRUTCHLEY and helps him.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: But how delightful, Lady Peter ! To think you knew dear old Mrs. Bateson ! You heard about the tragedy, of course ?

HARRIET: Tragedy ?

MISS TWITTERTON: Yes, they were *sold up*. That was when Uncle bought the house.

GOODACRE (*turns to the WIMSEYS*): And how long do you propose to stay with us, may I ask ?

PETER: Well, permanently, more or less, off and on, you know.

HARRIET: As a sort of week-end cottage.

PETER: Yes—fishin' and shootin' and all that. As a matter of fact, we've bought this house.

GOODACRE: Bought it ! Well, well, this is a complete surprise. And so I have the unexpected pleasure of welcoming two new parishioners. But I trust your Uncle is not deserting us, Miss Twitterton ?

MISS TWITTERTON (*who has nearly burst during these formal nothings*): But you don't understand Mr. Goodacre——

GOODACRE: In fact, I had brought him a little rock-plant for his garden——

HARRIET (*to PETER*): You're wrong. It's a plant not a tobacco-pouch——

MISS TWITTERTON: It's *too* dreadful. Uncle never let me know a word about it——

GOODACRE: —a little *Teesdalia Nudicaulis*——

[CRUTCHLEY *crosses to R.*

PETER (*to HARRIET*): *Other* pocket—you wait——

MISS TWITTERTON: —and he isn't *here*—he's gone off to Broxford——

GOODACRE: —it prefers a sunny situation. (*Set down plant beside him.*)

PETER: Cigarette, padre ? (*Offers his own case.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: —and we can't find him anywhere——

GOODACRE: Eh? No, no—thank you. I fear 'm an inveterate pipe-smoker. (*Pulling out pouch.*)

MARRIET (*to PETER*): You win. (*PETER grins and does thumbs up.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: —and he's left the house all in a muddle and we can't get hold of him——
CRUTCHLEY *puts can down by steps.*)

GOODACRE: Dear, dear, I'm sorry I've missed him. I'm just going my round for subscriptions to the concert we are getting up in aid of the Church Music Fund.

[*CRUTCHLEY comes back, and edges radio cabinet into place so that it stands exactly under the hanging cactus.*]

MARRIET: Is the choir still going strong, Mr. Goodacre? Do you still do dear old Bunnett and F?

GOODACRE: Oh, we have made a great deal of progress. We have advanced to Stanford in C. At the last Harvest Festival we tackled the "Hallelujah Chorus" with great success.

MARRIET: How magnificent!

GOODACRE: But we sadly need a new set of bellows. The old ones are patched past mending any more.

[*CRUTCHLEY mounts steps to wind the clock.*]

MISS TWITTERTON: And when we were doing the "Hallelujah Chorus"——

GOODACRE: Miss Twitterton presides at the organ——

MISS TWITTERTON: —the wind simply gave out together——

PETER: And the rest was silence.

MISS TWITTERTON: It really was dreadful—I was so embarrassed!

PETER: Miss Twitterton must be saved embarrassment at all costs. Perhaps you will allow me— (*Producing note-case and crossing to THE VICAR.*)

GOODACRE: Dear me! (*Rises, dropping programme.*) I didn't mean—really—this is most generous—too bad, your very first day in the parish. I—really—I'm almost ashamed to—such a large sum— (*He stands stock-still in the middle of the room, fingering the crackling piece of paper, smiling with excitement and delight. For an instant everyone in the room is struck into a kind of immobility, gazing at the magic piece of paper: all action arrested for a moment.*) Do you know, it is quite a long time since I handled a proper Bank of England note? (*His voice breaks the spell, and all the arrested motion flows on again. PETER picks up the programme.*) Perhaps you'd like to look at the programme for the concert? (*Fumbles for programme.*) Ah, you have it. (*CRUTCHLEY comes down steps.*)

HARRIET: Do let me look! (*He crosses to her, and they look over it together. Exit CRUTCHLEY with steps and can.*)

PETER: Piano Solo, Miss Twitterton—we mustn't miss that on any account. Song by the Rev. Simon Goodacre, "Hybrias the Cretan"—that's the stuff. Folk-songs and Sea-shanties by the Choir—"Shenandoah"—"Rio Grande"—"Birds in the Wilderness"— (*Surveying the room*) That's exactly what we feel like. (*Sings*) "Here we sit like birds in the wilderness—"

HARRIET (*sings*): *Birds in the wilderness—*

PUFFETT (*loudly*): *BIRDS in the wilderness—* (*And, as they crash gaily into the last crescendo, Miss TWITTERTON and MR. GOODACRE join in.*)

ALL: Here we sit like *BIRDS* in the wilderness,
DOWN in Demerara!

GOODACRE: We gave that with great spirit.

PUFFETT: Nothing like a 'earty song to take yer mind off yer troubles, is there, me lord?

PETER: Rather!

GOODACRE: Well, Puffett, you seem to be having a little trouble with Mr. Noakes's—I should say Lord Peter's—chimney. What's the matter with it?

PETER: Something catastrophic, according to Puffett.

PUFFETT: No, sir, nothing like that. Just sut. Corroded sut. Doo to neglect.

GOODACRE: That's bad, that's bad. A friend of mine had sad trouble with corroded sut—soot. But I was able to help him with an old-fashioned remedy. I wonder now—I wonder— (*Rises.*) Is Mrs. Ruddle here? The invaluable Mrs. Ruddle?

MISS TWITTERTON: But of course, Mr. Goodacre, I *told* her ladyship about Mrs. Ruddle. And I'm sure I'd have come over myself—

HARRIET (*opens door and calls*): Mrs. Ruddle!

MRS. RUDDLE (*off*): D'you call, mum?

HARRIET: Just come here, will you?

MRS. RUDDLE (*off*): I'm comin', mum—me lady.

MISS TWITTERTON: I wish I *had* come over now, last night. All this upset—

HARRIET (*as she comes down-stage*): No, really, Miss Twitterton, it's been great fun, and you mustn't worry about us any more. (*Enter MRS. RUDDLE wiping her hands.*)

GOODACRE: Ah, Mrs. Ruddle, good morning. Now I wonder if you could borrow your son's old shot-gun for us? The one he uses for scaring the birds?

MRS. RUDDLE: I can pop over and see, sir.

PETER: Let Crutchley go for you.

MRS. RUDDLE: Well, 'e's quicker on his feet nor what I am, sir.

GOODACRE: Loaded, of course, Mrs. Ruddle?

MRS. RUDDLE: Yes, sir. (*Exit MRS. RUDDLE.*)

GOODACRE: There's nothing like one of these old duck-guns—discharged up the chimney—for clearing corroded soot.

PUFFETT: I don't 'old with that, sir. It's the power be'ind the rods as does it.

GOODACRE: I assure you, Puffett, the shot-gun cleared my friend's chimney instantly.

PUFFETT: That may be, sir, but it ain't a remedy as I should care to apply. If the rods don't do it, then it's ladders you want, not 'igh explosive. (*He comes sulkily down-stage R. and picks up his sweaters.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: But, Mr. Goodacre, you are sure it's quite safe? I'm always very nervous about guns in the house, you know; all these accidents . . .

HARRIET (*following PUFFETT*): Oh, please don't desert us, Mr. Puffett. We don't like to hurt Mr. Goodacre's feelings. But please stand by, in case anything happens.

PETER (*coming down the other side*): Have a heart, Puffett.

PUFFETT: Well, m'lady, anything to oblige. But don't say I didn't warn you, my lord. I don't 'old with such-like.

HARRIET: It won't bring the chimney down, will it? (*MR. PUFFETT puts his sweaters down again.*)

PUFFETT: Oh, it won't bring the chimney down. (*Picks up his bowler and plants it firmly on his head.*) If you likes to humour the old gentleman, on your 'ead be it—in a manner of speaking, me lady.

HARRIET: Anyhow, everything must be well

covered up. (*Crosses L. to armchair. Enter CRUTCHLEY with gun, and MRS. RUDDLE.*)

PUFFETT: Well, m'lord, I've warned you.

GOODACRE: Ah, splendid. Thank you, Crutchley, thank you.

PETER: My God! Waterloo vintage! (*He backs away and crosses L. to HARRIET.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: You *have* been quick, Frank.

MRS. RUDDLE: There you are, sir. My boy says it's all loaded and ready.

MISS TWITTERTON: Are you *sure* it won't go off of its own accord?

PETER (*to HARRIET*): Will an Army mule go off of its own accord?

MISS TWITTERTON: You know, I never like the *idea* of firearms!

GOODACRE (*takes gun from CRUTCHLEY*): Trust me, Miss Twitterton—there will be no ill effects. (*Enter BUNTER. He side-steps gently on finding himself covered by THE VICAR's gun.*)

BUNTER: Excuse me, my lord. There is a person at the door—

PETER: Just a moment, Bunter. The fireworks are about to begin. The chimney is to be cleared by the natural expansion of gases.

BUNTER: Very good, my lord. (*To GOODACRE*) Excuse me, sir, had you not better permit me—

GOODACRE: No, no. I can manage it perfectly. (*He thrusts the gun and his head and shoulders beneath the chimney-drape.*)

PETER: You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!

MISS TWITTERTON (*clutching at CRUTCHLEY*): Oh, Frank! I know I shall scream at the noise.

GOODACRE (*peeping out*): There's no occasion for alarm. Now—are we all ready? (*He discharges*

the gun with shattering effect. The recoil flings him backwards, bringing the chimney-drape with him. MISS TWITTERTON gives a little scream. As BUNTER leaps to his rescue a terrific cloud of soot is flung into the room, smothering BUNTER in black from head to foot. Bricks, jackdaws' nests, and other odds and ends come hurtling down into the room.)

PUFFETT (*with satisfaction*): You can't say I didn't warn you. (*Miss TWITTERTON flutters round, making helpless little dashes at THE VICAR writhing in the drape. HARRIET and PETER are helplessly overcome.*)

PETER: You blasphemed the aspidistra! Something awful has come down that chimney!

HARRIET: Peter! It's Mr. Goodacre in the sheet! (*When the confusion has cleared, CRUTCHLEY and MRS. RUDDLE lead away BUNTER, who is completely blinded. LORD PETER and PUFFETT hasten to extricate GOODACRE from the chimney-drape.*)

PETER: Not hurt, sir, I hope?

GOODACRE (*rubbing shoulder*): Not at all, not at all. A little arnica will soon put that to rights. (*Looking at débris*) It appears to have been effective.

PETER: Remarkably so. Surprising, the things you find in old chimneys.

GOODACRE: No dead bodies, I trust?

PETER: Only two jackdaws. And an owl. And seven or eight feet of ancient chain, as formerly worn by the Mayor of Pagglesham. (*Seizes a piece of newspaper and picks up chain gingerly.*)

GOODACRE: Ah, an old pot-chain, very likely.

PUFFETT: 'Ere's a bit of one o' they roasting-jacks they used in the old days.

PETER: Well—we seem to have loosened things up a bit, anyhow. Better see if we can get the brush through the pot now.

PUFFETT (*darkly*): If it's still there! (*Dives in*

under chimney-breast.) I will say as if you looks up you can see the sky, which is more than you'd see this morning. (PETER *dives underneath.* Re-enter BUNTER, *partially cleansed, though still unlike himself.*)

BUNTER: Excuse me, my lord. The individual at the door is asking for Mr. Noakes. (PETER *emerges.*) I've told him he is not here, but he will not take my word for it. (PUFFETT *emerges.*)

PETER: Did you ask if he would see Miss Twitterton? What does he want, do you know?

BUNTER: He refused to state his business, my lord. He says it is urgent and personal. (PUFFETT *begins to tie his rods together with bits of string from his pocket.*)

PETER: What sort of an "individual" d'you think he is, Bunter?

BUNTER (*sketching Hebraic gesture*): A financial individual, my lord.

PETER: Oh! Name of Moses?

BUNTER: Name of MacBride, my lord.

PETER: A distinction without a difference. Well, Miss Twitterton, will you see this financial Scotsman?

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, Lord Peter, I really don't know what to say. I know nothing about my Uncle's business affairs.

PETER: Would you rather I tackled him?

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, it's *too* kind of you, Lord Peter.

HARRIET: My husband loves minding other people's business, Miss Twitterton.

PETER: Show him in. Let 'em all come. And Bunter! Allow me to invest you with the Order of the Chimney, for attempting a rescue against overwhelming odds. (PUFFETT *begins methodically rolling up paper from the floor.* PETER *hangs the chain*

round BUNTER's neck and places the roasting-jack in his hand.)

BUNTER (*gravely*): I am much obliged to your lordship.

PETER: Oh! and Bunter (*with a wave of the arm towards the chimney*) take up the bodies! But the soldiers may be excused from shooting. We've had enough of that for one morning!

BUNTER: Very good, my lord. (*Sets the jack in a corner as he goes and drops the chain into a painted drainpipe near the fireplace R.*)

HARRIET: Oh, Peter dear! What a marvellous honeymoon we're having!

PETER: It's the finest honeymoon I've ever had. Simply packed with incident. (*Glancing round and seeing that GOODACRE is peering hopefully up the chimney, with MISS TWITTERTON hovering behind him, he kisses HARRIET*) Though a sensitive man might welcome a trifle more privacy. (*Re-enter BUNTER.*)

BUNTER: Mr. MacBride. (*PUFFETT, seeing piece of string on the floor, picks it up and methodically rolls it as MACBRIDE enters. MACBRIDE is a brisk young cockney Jew, with eyes that see everything and a regrettable tie. Exit BUNTER.*)

MACBRIDE: 'Morning. Lord Peter Wimsey, I believe. Very sorry to trouble your lordship. Understand you're staying here. Fact is, I have to see Mr. Noakes on a little matter of business.

PETER: Just so. Well, I'm afraid Mr. Noakes isn't here. I only wish he was. But you'll probably find him over at Broxford. (*MR. PUFFETT pockets his string. Re-enter CRUTCHLEY.*)

CRUTCHLEY: Mr. Bunter told me to clear up, my lord. (*PETER nods.*)

MACBRIDE: Oh, no, that won't work. I've been over to Broxford and they said I should find him here. (*CRUTCHLEY helps PUFFETT to clear up dust-sheets and paper.*)

PETER: Then they were mistaken. He's not here, and we've no idea where he is.

MISS TWITTERTON: Not over at Broxford? Then where *can* he be? It's most worrying. Oh dear, Mr. Goodacre, can't you suggest something?

PETER: This is Mr. Noakes's niece, Miss Twitterton. Perhaps you can state your business to her.

MACBRIDE: Sorry. Nothing doing. I've got to see the old gentleman personally. And it's no good trying to put me off, because I know all the dodges. (*He sits down firmly on the left-hand settle. PETER fetches cigars from the whatnot.*)

GOODACRE: Young man, you had better keep a civil tongue in your head. Lord Peter Wimsey has given you his personal assurance that we do not know where to find Mr. Noakes. You don't suppose his lordship would tell you an untruth?

MACBRIDE: Wouldn't he, though? There's nobody like the British aristocracy to tell you a good stiff lie without batting an eyelid. His lordship's face would be a fortune to him in the witness-box.

PETER (*as he passes* HARRIET): Where it is not unknown. Mr. MacBride, have a cigar. (*There is a twinkle in his eye. MACBRIDE accepts the cigar.*) Now then—who do you represent?

MACBRIDE (*looking shrewdly at PETER and suddenly sitting up and favouring him with a conspiratorial wink*): Macdonald & Abrahams: Bedford Row.

PETER: Ah, yes! Macdonald & Abrahams—that clannish old firm. Solicitors?

MACBRIDE: That's right. (HARRIET *sits in window-seat.*)

PETER: Well, you want Mr. Noakes. So do I. So does Miss Twitterton.

MISS TWITTERTON: Yes, indeed, I'm *very* worried about Uncle——

PETER: But you won't find him in my house.

MACBRIDE: *Your house?* (PUFFETT *takes off his bowler and begins to put on his sweaters.*)

PETER: I have just bought this house from Mr. Noakes.

MACBRIDE (*enlightened*): Oh-h-h! So *that's* the nigger in the wood-pile. You've bought the house, eh? Paid for it?

GOODACRE (*scandalised*): Really, Mr. MacBride! (CRUTCHLEY *rolls up last bit of paper.*)

PETER: Naturally I have paid for it.

MACBRIDE: Scapa'd! (CRUTCHLEY *turns sharply to him.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Scapa'd?

MACBRIDE: Skipped! Vamoosed! Skipped with the cash.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh!

HARRIET: It's all right, Miss Twitterton. He doesn't know any more than we do.

PETER (*to MACBRIDE*): Looks like it, doesn't it?

CRUTCHLEY: Skipped? And how about my forty pounds? D'you mean to say——

MISS TWITTERTON: Frank!

MACBRIDE: Ah, you're another, are you? And how about us? How about our client's money?

MISS TWITTERTON: But I don't understand. What money? What's it all got to do with Uncle William? (MACBRIDE *crosses to her quickly.*)

MACBRIDE: See this? That's a writ. Little matter of nine hundred pounds, that's all (PUFFETT *emerges quickly through second sweater at this.*)

MISS TWITTERTON	}	Nine hundred pounds ?
GOODACRE		Nine hundred pounds ?
CRUTCHLEY		Nine 'undred ?

MACBRIDE: Capital and interest. Levy, Levy & Levy. Running five years. Can't wait for ever, you know.

MISS TWITTERTON: But there must be some *mistake*. My Uncle's business—I'm sure it's all a mistake—

MACBRIDE: Your uncle's business, miss, hasn't got a leg to stand on. Not a hundred pounds' worth of stock in the place—and I don't suppose *that's* paid for. Your uncle's broke.

HARRIET: Oh, Miss Twitterton, I am so sorry.

MISS TWITTERTON: I don't understand.

CRUTCHLEY: Broke ? And how about my forty pounds what he made me put into the business ?

MACBRIDE: Well, you won't see that again, Mr. Whoever-you-are. He didn't take you into partnership ? Well, that's a bit of luck for you. We can't come on you for what's missing. May I ask what you paid for the house, my lord ? No offence and all that.

PETER: Six-fifty—unfurnished. I'm afraid that won't cover you—even if you get it.

MACBRIDE: Cheap.

HARRIET: We thought it was.

PETER: And now we know why.

MACBRIDE: There you are. Cut price for spot cash.

CRUTCHLEY: Given me the slip, the swindlin' old devil !

GOODACRE: Steady, Crutchley, steady. Remember Miss Twitterton. (MACBRIDE *sits again*.)

PETER: There's the furniture; that belongs to him.

MACBRIDE: I dare say. If it's paid for.

MISS TWITTERTON: But it's impossible! We thought Uncle was so well off.

MACBRIDE: So he is—well off out of this—about a thousand miles by this time.

GOODACRE: Most distressing, most distressing.

PUFFETT: I'm *sorry* for you, Miss Twitterton, that I am.

CRUTCHLEY: I'll have my forty pounds out o' somebody. (*Turning suddenly on Miss TWITTERTON*) Here, you, Aggie Twitterton—you know he promised to pay me. You've had a hand in this, blast you! I'll have the law on you—swindlin'— (*in a furious undertone*).

GOODACRE: Come, come, Crutchley! It's not Miss Twitterton's fault. You must not fly into a passion. We must all be calm.

PETER: Let us beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. Talking of temperance, how about a spot? Bunter! (*calling off*).

BUNTER: Yes, my lord (*appearing in doorway*).

PETER: *Have* we any drinks in the house?

BUNTER: Certainly, my lord.

PUFFETT (*hopefully*): Mr. Noakes always kep' a good barrel of beer in the cellar. I will say that for the old—gentleman. (*He begins to roll up a piece of string he picks up down-stage R.*)

PETER: Bunter, a jug of beer and the whisky. Oh! and some sherry for the ladies. (*Exit BUNTER.*) Strictly speaking, I suppose, Mr. MacBride, it's your client's beer—but if you've no objection—

MACBRIDE: Well, a drop of beer's neither here nor there, is it, now?

GOODACRE: Sherry has always appeared to me a most agreeable wine. (*Exit CRUTCHLEY with bundle of papers.*) I was so glad to read in th

newspaper that it was coming into its own again, both in London *and* in the Universities. A very reassuring sign. I cannot think that these modern cocktails can be either healthful or palatable. But I can see no objection to a glass of sound wine now and again—for the stomach's sake——

CRUTCHLEY (*re-entering—aside to PUFFETT*): Belly-ache, more like !

GOODACRE: —as the Apostle says. It is undoubtedly restorative in moments of agitation, like the present.

PUFFETT: Beer is best. (*GOODACRE goes over to Miss TWITTERTON.*)

GOODACRE: I am afraid, Miss Twitterton, this has been a sad shock to you.

MISS TWITTERTON: I couldn't have thought it of Uncle. I just can't believe it. (*CRUTCHLEY picks up more papers.*)

CRUTCHLEY: I can—easily (*aside to PUFFETT, who nods*). Gone off with my forty pounds !

PETER: I say, Crutchley, suppose you just get rid of the doings. You can have a word with Mr. MacBride afterwards if you want to. (*CRUTCHLEY moves towards door, but PUFFETT is rolling up string from the bundle of papers.*)

CRUTCHLEY: Yes, my lord.

PUFFETT: Safe bind, safe find, Frank Crutchley. Put yer money away careful, same as I puts this here bit of twine, and there it is, 'andy when you wants it. (*He stores away the string in a remote sweater pocket. CRUTCHLEY goes without answering, as BUNTER enters with sherry, etc. HARRIET rises and comes down-stage.*)

PETER: All right, Bunter, I'll see to this. (*BUNTER puts the tray on the up-stage corner of the sideboard. PETER regards the curious mixed selection of glasses and mugs quizzically, and begins to pour out. Exit*

BUNTER.) Darling, I think a visit to Mr. Woolworth is clearly indicated, in the near future. Now, Miss Twitterton, a glass of sherry——

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, Lord Peter! At this time in the morning, I don't think—but of course it isn't really so early any longer, is it? (*He crosses to her.*) Well, really, if you insist——

PETER: As a present from Margate! It'll do you good. What's your poison, padre? (*as he hands HARRIET sherry*).

GOODACRE: Sherry, thank you. (*He goes up to sideboard, and Peter hands him glass. He raises it to HARRIET.*) Your health, my dear young people.

HARRIET: Thank you, Mr. Goodacre.

GOODACRE: Take courage, Miss Twitterton. Things may not be as bad as they seem.

PETER: Mr. MacBride?

MACBRIDE: If it's all the same to you, I'll wait for the beer. I'm sure it's no pleasure to me, bringing all this unfortunate disturbance into the family. But business is business, ain't it, your lordship? And we've got our clients to consider. (*GOODACRE goes back to his seat.*)

PETER (*while he is talking, PETER arranges three large glasses in a row, ready for the beer*): You're not to blame, Mr. MacBride. Miss Twitterton realises you're only doing your rather unpleasant duty.

MISS TWITTERTON: I'm sure, if we could only find Uncle, he'd explain everything. (*She hastily sips her sherry, coughs, and subsides in confusion.*)

PETER: Yes; if we could find Mr. Noakes.

MACBRIDE: If we could find him. (*Door opens quickly. Enter BUNTER.*)

BUNTER: My lord. I'm afraid we've found Mr. Noakes.

PETER: *Afraid* you've found him? (*He stares at*

BUNTER. MR. MACBRIDE *starts to his feet, as does HARRIET.*) For God's sake, Bunter, don't say you've found—— Where? Down the cellar? (MRS. RUDDLE's voice can be heard off, calling. MISS TWITTERTON rises, then THE VICAR.)

MRS. RUDDLE: Frank! Frank Crutchley! It's Mr. Noakes!

BUNTER: Yes, my lord.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, he's dead! Uncle's dead! (*She drops her mug.*)

HARRIET: Oh, no, Miss Twitterton, they can't mean that.

GOODACRE: Oh, no, impossible. (*All look at BUNTER, who nods gravely.*) You can't mean to say——?

BUNTER: I am very much afraid so, sir. (CRUTCHLEY hurries in behind BUNTER.)

CRUTCHLEY: What's happened?

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, I *knew* it, I *knew* it. I knew something terrible had happened! Uncle's dead and all the money's gone.

HARRIET: You poor dear! (MISS TWITTERTON becomes hysterical. HARRIET goes to soothe her. CRUTCHLEY and PUFFETT make a concerted rush for the door, back.)

PUFFETT: Come along, Frank. Better see if we can give a hand. (BUNTER holds them back.)

BUNTER: Wait a minute. Better not touch anything. (*As if those words were a signal for which he had been waiting, PETER knocks out the dead ashes from his pipe into his hand, crushes them with his thumb, and flings the débris on to the tray. He puts the pipe in his pocket. CRUTCHLEY staggers back against wall R.*)

GOODACRE: But perhaps he's only fainted. (*He looks helplessly from BUNTER to PETER.*)

BUNTER: Dead some days, from the looks of him, sir.

MACBRIDE: Has he got the money on him?
(*Nobody pays any attention to him.*)

GOODACRE: But how did it happen, my man?
Did he fall down the stairs in a fit?

MACBRIDE: Cut his throat, more likely.

BUNTER: It's not suicide (*with emphasis*).

[*Enter MRS. RUDDLE, distressed.*]

PETER: Bunter! Are you trying to tell us that this is murder? (*They all turn and stare at PETER, then at BUNTER. Miss TWITTERTON slides to the floor in a faint.*)

BUNTER: I couldn't say, my lord; but it looks most unpleasantly like it. (*HARRIET kneels by Miss TWITTERTON.*)

HARRIET: Give me a glass of water, please, quickly. (*THE VICAR goes to help.*)

PETER: Leave everything as it is. Go for the police, Crutchley (*mechanically pouring water into a glass.*)

BUNTER: Yes, my lady. Mrs. Ruddle! (*She starts.*) Glass of water, sharp.

MRS. RUDDLE (*edging forward*): Yes, Mr. Bunter. If your lordship will excuse me, sir, if it's the police you're sending for—— (*PETER holds out the glass to her.*) Sir, young Joe Sellon, that's the constable, 'e's standin' at my gate this very minute with his bicycle, yarnin' with my Albert—— (*She awakes to the fact of the glass of water, takes it, and hurries across to HARRIET and helps her with Miss TWITTERTON.*)

PETER: Bunter, see that no one goes down into the cellar until the constable comes.

BUNTER: Yes, my lord. (*PETER pours out a stiff tot of whisky.*)

PETER: Here, Crutchley, take this (*pushes glass into his hand*). Pull yourself together. Run across to Mrs. Ruddle's and get this policeman. Quick.

CRUTCHLEY: Thank you, my lord. It's a bit of a shock. (*He swallows down the whisky in one gulp and goes out. BUNTER takes his glass as he goes.*)

PUFFETT (*nudging BUNTER*): Suppose you didn't manage to get that beer up afore you—eh? Oh, well, there's worse thing's 'appen in war. (*He follows him out, clapping the bowler on his head as he goes through the doorway.*)

[THE VICAR looks helplessly round, but HARRIET is entirely occupied with MISS TWITTERTON. He looks at PETER, standing with his back to the room, realises he cannot be spoken to, so picks up his rock-plant and goes out without a word.]

MRS. RUDDLE: There! She's better now, pore thing. (*MISS TWITTERTON shows signs of returning life.*) Don't give way now, there's a dear. (*She and HARRIET help her up.*) What you want is a nice lay-down and a cupper tea. Shall I take her upstairs, me lady?

HARRIET: Yes; do. I'll come in a moment.

[MRS. RUDDLE propels MISS TWITTERTON towards the staircase, and she goes unresistingly.]

MRS. RUDDLE: Now you come along and 'ave a nice lay-down. (*Exeunt up the stairs.*) You'll be all right in two shakes of a duck's tail!

HARRIET (*crossing centre*): Peter, my poor dear! And we came here for a quiet honeymoon!

PETER (*not moving*): Damn! And damn! Back to the old grind. *Rigor mortis* and who-saw-him-last, blood-prints, fingerprints, footprints, information received, and it-is-my-dooty-to-warn-you—

P.C. SELLON (*enters back*): Now then, wot's all this?

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same: about 1.30 on Wednesday afternoon, HARRIET is seated on the right-hand settle, eating a sandwich and gazing into the fire. A plate of sandwiches, glasses, etc., on table L. centre. MACBRIDE is standing in front of the radio cabinet. He finishes a sandwich, takes out handkerchief, polishes mouth, nose and hands as curtain rises. Most of the furniture is now uncovered and arranged. PETER is standing staring out of window. He holds an empty tankard and is vaguely whistling "Après de ma Blonde."

HARRIET (*coming out of a fit of abstraction and turning to MACBRIDE*): Another sandwich, Mr. MacBride?

MACBRIDE: No more, thanks. Much obliged to you. (*Picks up half empty glass of beer from radio cabinet, swallows it down.*)

HARRIET: Is the doctor still there, I wonder?

MACBRIDE (*goes to door up-stage and looks out*): He's just coming out with his bag in his hand. Looks as though he's done his bit. Pleasant job, I don't think.

HARRIET: I suppose they'll be wanting this room in a minute, for the police.

MACBRIDE: I can't hang about here all day. I've got to get back to Town.

PETER (*suddenly bursting into song*):

The blackbird and the throstle
The laverock in the sky—
In my lady's bosom
Sweet it is to lie, to lie (*enter BUNTER*),
In my lady's—

BUNTER: Your lordship will excuse me—

PETER: Eh! Oh, sorry, was I making a noise?

BUNTER: Superintendent Kirk would like to speak to your lordship.

MACBRIDE: *I should like to speak to Superintendent Kirk. My time's valuable! (He is off through the door in a twinkling, before the scandalised BUNTER can interfere.)*

PETER: Now, I suppose, we go over the cellar with a tooth-comb. *(Goes out gloomily.)*

BUNTER: Shall I clear, my lady?

HARRIET: Yes, please. I hope you've had something to eat, Bunter.

BUNTER: Yes, thank you, my lady. *(Begins to collect plates.)* The heavy luggage has just arrived, per Carter Paterson.

HARRIET: Good heavens! I'd forgotten all about it.

BUNTER: Very natural, my lady, if I may say so. In view of all the circumstances, does your ladyship desire me to order in any coal? I inquired of his lordship, and he said he would refer the matter to your ladyship.

HARRIET: Coal? Why yes, I suppose we shall have to have some coal.

[But she is uneasy. The door is opened by PETER, who, without entering, says to the POLICE outside:]

PETER: You'll get more light on the stairs if I open this door.

BUNTER *(to HARRIET)*: Very good, my lady. *(He continues to clear away the plates, glasses, etc. Several pairs of feet are heard descending the cellar stairs, off. HARRIET and BUNTER both pause—the latter in the act of picking up MACBRIDE's glass—as the voices are again heard, off—the POLICEMAN's a confused growl, PETER's nearer and clearer, as from the top of the stair.)*

HARRIET: I do wish he hadn't to be worried like this—it's too bad.

BUNTER: Yes, my lady. *(But his face conveys that he shares her feeling.)*

HARRIET: I wonder. Do you think I was right to order the coal?

BUNTER (*non-committally*): It is not for me to say, my lady.

HARRIET: You've known him much longer than I have, Bunter. If his lordship had only himself to consider, do you suppose he would go or stay?

BUNTER: Under those circumstances, my lady, I fancy his lordship would decide to remain.

HARRIET: Then you had better order enough coal for a month!

BUNTER: Certainly, my lady. (*Exit with tray. A POLICE-SERGEANT is seen passing the window, carrying a rolled-up stretcher. HARRIET goes up-stage and looks out. Enter PETER, briskly.*)

PETER: Too many constabulary boots tramping over that cellar. At any rate, I think I've succeeded in establishing our innocence and sanity.

HARRIET (*at window*): The ambulance has come. (*PETER joins her at the window.*)

PETER: Poor old devil! So the house *will* be rid of him. Well, perhaps it's better not to feel too much sympathy with the corpse when one's investigating murders. It cramps one's style.

HARRIET: But, Peter, need you investigate this?

PETER (*lightly*): No, I needn't. But I *expect* I shall.

HARRIET: You've got a right to your own life sometimes. It's such a beastly little crime. (*Moves away down-stage.*)

PETER (*with a sudden outburst*): That's just it. That's why I can't leave it alone. God! if you knew how I loathe haste and blood and violence. This damned butcher's work. Men quarrelling and killing like beasts . . . Sorry.

HARRIET: Carry on, Peter.

PETER: You're sure you don't mind? Can you put up with all these policemen about the place? (*He follows her down-stage.*)

HARRIET (*with determined cheerfulness*): Of course I don't mind; they look very charming policemen. (*There is an uncomfortable pause.*) Peter!—(*she simply can't help herself*)—there weren't—there weren't rats in that cellar, were there?

PETER: No, dearest. No rats. And all quite dry. Just a perfectly good cellar.

HARRIET: I'm glad. I was sort of imagining rats. (*Enter PUFFETT.*)

PUFFETT: They're takin' Mr. Noakes away. Shall I be gettin' on with the kitchen chimney?

HARRIET: Yes, do.

PUFFETT (*at fireplace*): Ah! draws beautiful now, don't she?

HARRIET: Simply marvellously.

PUFFETT: It's a good thing Mr. Noakes ain't alive to see all that 'eap o' coal. That's a fire as does credit to a chimney.

PETER: All right, Puffett. Better get ahead with the job. (*SELLON and SERGEANT pass window. They are obviously carrying a stretcher. They all turn and watch in silence.*)

PUFFETT: Very good, my lord. (*Moves to door.*) And where's all 'is cheese-parin' brought 'im? Nowhere. (*Exit PUFFETT.*)

PETER: Another epitaph. *De mortuis*, and then some. And now we proceed to the interrogation.

HARRIET: Yes. I suppose we do. (*Sits at table.*)

PETER: Of course, the Superintendent may cut the Gordian knot by refusing to avail himself of our kind assistance. The local police aren't fools, these days, by any means. Their routine gets them a long way, though it may take them a hell

of a time. The only trouble is, they'll begin by asking WHO did it and WHY? It's no good asking WHO? till you know the answer and can prove it. And it's no good asking WHY? at all, because motives are always misleading, and, anyhow, you don't have to prove motive. You've got to begin by asking, WHEN, WHERE and HOW? HOW? is the only real question. When you know HOW you know WHO.

HARRIET: Good heavens! I've married my one Intelligent Reader! Artistically, it's the only——

PETER: If it's right in art it's right in practice. It is the only practical way. But you'll see. Once these chaps get going it will be hue and cry after WHO and WHY.

HARRIET: Oh! give them WHEN.

PETER: WHEN is a gift. Nobody can miss that. They'll find out when Noakes was last seen alive, and when he was first known to be missing.

HARRIET: And the alibis will all depend on who could beg, borrow, steal, or cut keys to the house.

PETER: WHERE is going to bring them up short. It's the devil. Noakes may have fallen where he lay, crawled there, or been carried.

HARRIET: Yes. That's true. It might have been anywhere—I wonder how long they'll take over that?

PETER: Nothing like the time they'll then take over WHY. WHY means motive, and the first motive they're going to look for will be money. They can spend days tying themselves into knots over the money Noakes was supposed to have, but hadn't, and the money he wasn't supposed to have, but had! And then there will be black-mail revenge——

HARRIET: Harp, sackbut, psaltery, and the band as before.

PETER (*completely launched*): HOW. The snag about HOW is that all footprints, fingerprints and signs of disturbance have been obligingly removed or covered up by us. It's going to be a job to prove HOW from circumstantial evidence. But I tell you now, we'll never get it the other way. Every time we ask WHY? we shall go wrong; every time we ask HOW? we *may* be going right.

HARRIET: The place is what I should like to fix. If it wasn't in the cellar—— (*SELLON passes the window, returning quickly; HARRIET rises with a worried glance towards the staircase. Enter SUPERINTENDENT KIRK.*)

PETER: Well, Superintendent. All ready for the third degree? (*SELLON follows the SUPERINTENDENT.*)

KIRK: It ain't likely to come to that, my lord. That's right, Joe, come along. Let's see how you get on with a bit of short'and. (*PETER pushes the small settle up to the table.*)

HARRIET: There's a nice, imposing chair for you, Superintendent.

KIRK: Thank you, my lady.

SELLON: That's old Mr. Noakes's chair, that was. (*KIRK moves across towards table.*)

PETER: So Galahad will sit down in Merlin's seat!

KIRK (*arrested*): Tennyson!

PETER: Got it in one! A bit of a student, Super?

KIRK: I like to do a bit of good reading in me off-duty. Broadens and mellers the mind. Reading maketh a full man——

HARRIET: —conference a ready man——

KIRK: —and writing an exact man ! Mind that, Joe Sellon.

PETER: Bacon ! Mr. Kirk, you're a man after my own heart.

KIRK: Thank you, my lord. (*Sits.*) Well now, we'll have to get down to business.

PETER: Get yourself a chair, Sellon.

[SELLON *gets chair from R. and places it right of table. PETER places chair for HARRIET left of table, and stands behind her.*]

KIRK: We needn't trouble *you* very much, my lord. I think you've given me all the facts we're likely to want. If you've no objection to telling me what you paid for this house——

PETER: Six-fifty.

KIRK: Then that accounts for the money we found on the body.

PETER: So he had it on him, then ? In cash ?

KIRK: Currency notes.

PETER (*whistles*): All of it ?

KIRK: Every ha'penny.

HARRIET: That's funny. It rather looks as though he *had* intended to make a bolt with it. Or he'd surely have paid it into the bank.

KIRK: Quite right, my lady. And it complicates the question of motive. (*PETER and HARRIET exchange glances.*) It don't seem to be a case of robbery from the person. And what I asks myself is *why*——

PETER: Isn't it a little early to ask that ? It's a fact that he wasn't robbed.

HARRIET: And he could have paid Crutchley his forty pounds.

KIRK: 'Course he could, if he'd wanted to. He was a proper old dodger, was Mr. Noakes—a real Artful Dodger.

PETER { Dickens ! (*Absolutely together ; slapping*
KIRK { *their palms on the table as if playing*
Snap.)

KIRK : Well, then, you decided to come here for your honeymoon ? (*Consults his own note-book.*)

PETER : Yes. You mightn't think it, but I'm really rather a shy, modest, retiring sort of bloke——

HARRIET : Mr. Kirk, when it comes to newspaper reporters sitting all day on the doorstep and hiding in the back of the car—— (MR. KIRK *grunts sympathetically.*)

PETER : And trying to bribe your servants—— happily Bunter's sea-green incorruptible——

KIRK : Carlyle, French Revolution. (*Slowly, firmly, PETER is caught.*)

PETER : Well, what I mean to say—we announced the wedding for the wrong day, took our tickets for Mentone, and then got married in a decent Christian, inconspicuous manner and buzzed along here, leaving them to it. And I particularly asked Mr. Noakes to say nothing about us.

KIRK : He attended to that part of your instructions all right !

HARRIET : They'll soon hunt us out after this. That's the worst of——

KIRK : That fierce light which beats upon a throne.

PETER : Here ! you can't have Tennyson twice.

KIRK : Well, my lady, *we'll* do our best for you. I don't like reporters myself. Now to come back again—what arrangements did you make for taking possession ?

PETER : I've got the letter. (*Searching in breast pocket.*)

HARRIET : Mr. Noakes said he'd let the char-
woman know and have everything straight.

PETER: Only he didn't, and it wasn't. (*Hands letter to KIRK, who glances over it with a nod.*)

HARRIET: So when we came down last night and found the house all shut up—

KIRK: All shut up, was it? You're sure of that?

PETER: Quite sure. (*KIRK returns letter to PETER.*)

HARRIET: Yes, so am I.

PETER: Both doors locked and burglar-proof bolts on the windows. I tried them all to see if we couldn't get in.

KIRK: Get that down, Joe Sellon.

PETER: We knocked up Mrs. Ruddle, and she sent us over to Pagford to Miss Twitterton—

HARRIET: And we showed her Mr. Noakes's letter, and she gave us the key—

PETER: And when we did get in, the chimneys all started smoking like fury, so we just swallowed down a spot of grub and beetled off upstairs.

KIRK: That's a pity. You might have found some clue if you'd looked—but naturally as you wasn't expecting nothing you wouldn't notice nothing.

PETER: No.

KIRK: No! How about the morning? Of course, you moved a lot of stuff for the sweep.

PETER: Yes—you'd better ask Bunter. (*Calls off*) Bunter! What we want in this place is a bell!

KIRK: Well, Joe, 'ow's the shorthand? (*SELLON hands over note-book.*)

BUNTER (*off*): My lord! (*HARRIET crosses R., picks up handbag, takes cigarette from case, fumbles in PETER's coat pocket and extracts match-box.*)

PETER (*as BUNTER enters*): Bunter, Superintendent Kirk wants to ask you what the place

looked like last night. (*Goes up to fire and stands warming his hands behind his back.*)

BUNTER: There appeared to be no anomalies nor incongruities of any description, my lord. Everything presented a remarkably orderly appearance. Except— (*HARRIET puts match-box down on settle.*)

KIRK: Yes? (*BUNTER comes down-stage to level of table.*)

BUNTER: I attached no significance to it at the time, but there were two candlesticks in this room, on the sideboard. Both candles were burnt right down to the sockets. Burnt out.

KIRK: That's interesting. Very.

PETER: Night's candles are burnt out. (*KIRK does not take it up, so PETER comes down-stage and prods him in the ribs.*) I said, Night's candles are burnt out!

KIRK: Eh? Romeo and Juliet! Burnt out! Yes. They must a-been alight when he was killed. After dark, that means.

PETER: He died by candlelight. Sounds like the title of a highbrow thriller. (*Takes step or two down towards HARRIET.*)

KIRK: Well now? You saw nothing else of a suspicious nature? No mallet or bludgeon? Nothing in the way of—

PETER: He's going to say it! (*Grasps HARRIET by the elbow.*)

KIRK: Nothing in the way of a blunt instrument?

PETER }
HARRIET } He's said it!

PETER: Well, Bunter?

BUNTER: No, my lord. Nothing beyond the

customary household utensils in their appropriate situations. (HARRIET *sits down in corner of right-hand settle.*)

PETER: Have we any idea what sort of a blunt instrument it was? How big? What shape?

KIRK: Pretty 'eavy, my lord, I should say, with a smooth 'ead.

PETER: Meaning that it didn't draw blood?

KIRK: 'Ardly at all.

BUNTER: No, my lord. On discovering the body I naturally examined it—without, of course, moving it from its position. The skull was extensively fractured——

KIRK: Cracked like an egg-shell——

BUNTER: But the skin was scarcely broken.

PETER: Then it's useless looking for blood-stains, though I suppose there might be a little smear or a few hairs on the weapon. There was nothing unusual about the top of the cellar steps, because I looked.

KIRK: Ah! there's just the trouble. Even if there was any marks, we don't know where they'd be.

PETER: You mean you don't know where the murder actually took place?

KIRK: No, my lord. You see—well, as I understand, you've had a bit of experience with murders and such, so you'll enter into this. It's a bit of a mix-up——

PETER (*interrogating KIRK with a glance*): All right, Bunter, you can go. (*Exit BUNTER.*)

KIRK: The doctor says deceased—where's Doctor's report, Joe?

SELLON (*reading*): Deceased was struck with a 'eavy blunt instrument of some considerable extent of surface——

KIRK: Meaning by that it wasn't a little sharp thing like the beak of a 'ammer——

SELLON: On the posterior part of the—looks like onion or geranium——

PETER: Cranium.

KIRK: Meaning the back of the skull——

SELLON: A little above the left ear.

PETER (*demonstrating*): Here.

KIRK: A bit higher.

SELLON: The blow being directed from behind downwards——

HARRIET: Oh? but—surely that means——
(*Gets up as she speaks.*)

PETER: Another of our dear old friends——

HARRIET: The left-handed criminal. (*Demonstrates.*)

PETER: Or a back-handed blow. (*Demonstrates.*) How tall was Mr. Noakes?

KIRK: That's just the point. He was a very tall old gentleman. Say six-foot-two.

PETER: Look for a tall murderer——

HARRIET: Or a long-handled weapon——

KIRK: That's true.

PETER: Mallet, beetle——

HARRIET: Golf-club, croquet-mallet——

PETER: Gun-stock, spade, cricket bat, poker——

HARRIET: *Long* poker, broom——

PETER: Not heavy enough. Axe, pick, hatchet——

HARRIET: Not blunt enough. Not lead piping——

PETER: Nor a sandbag—nor a rolling-pin——

HARRIET: Nor a cosh, nor a hammer, nor a cleaver, nor a spanner——

HARRIET { (*in triumphant duet*): Unless, of course,
PETER { the victim was sitting down at the
time!

[HARRIET *subsides on to the settle again!*

KIRK: 'Strewth? You're quick, you two. And the lady's as smart as the gentleman.

PETER: My wife writes detective stories. It's her line.

KIRK: Oh, I see. Well. If you see any of those things what you mentioned lying about, you might let me know.

PETER: Yes—but the thing we want to know is, where was the murder committed? I take it, it's impossible that he killed himself falling down the steps? He was an oldish man, wasn't he?

KIRK: Sixty-five, roundabout. Sound as a bell, though, far as you can judge now.

SELLON: That's a fact, sir. Boasted of it, 'e did; talkin' large as Doctor said 'e was good for another quarter of a century! After 'e'd 'ad flu last winter. You ask Frank Crutchley if 'e didn't.

KIRK: Matter o' fact, my lord, our man says it's quite out of the question that it was the fall. Nature o' the injury, direction of the blow, and all that. He's quite certain.

PETER: I see. Was he killed where he fell?

KIRK: That's just it. We don't know. He didn't die straight off.

PETER: Ah!

SELLON: Shall I read out that bit, sir?

KIRK: No; it's only Doctor's rigmarole. I can explain to his lordship without all them onions and geraniums. Seemingly what happened was this. Somebody hit him and bust his skull, see? He'd tumble down and lose consciousness at once——

PETER: Concussed.

KIRK: That's right. And after a bit, he'd come to again. But he'd never know what hit him. Wouldn't remember a thing about it.

PETER: That all according to Cocker? (*To HARRIET.*)

HARRIET: Oh, yes. I know that bit off by heart. There'd be complete forgetfulness of everything immediately preceding the blow. He might pick himself up and feel quite all right for a time.

KIRK: Quite correct, my lady—except, of course, for a sore head. He might walk about, do all the usual things——

PETER: Such as locking the door—behind the murderer——

KIRK: *Exactly*; there's the trouble.

HARRIET: That's how the murderer could have got out of the house, and yet left it all locked up.

KIRK: Then he'd get giddy and drowsy like——

PETER: Wander off to get a drink——

KIRK: Pitch down the cellar steps—and die there.

PETER: That's probably how he *died*. It's a step in the right direction. But it does not tell us how he was *killed*. And it doesn't even tell us *where*.

HARRIET: No. It might have been indoors or outdoors, upstairs, downstairs——

KIRK (*seeing his chance*): In my lady's chamber!

PETER: No, no, Mother Goose! (*Flinging the last two words savagely at KIRK.*) Not there, not there, my child! (*To HARRIET*) How long did he live after he was hit?

SELLON: Doctor says, from half an hour to one hour, judging from the—(*but this bogs him hopelessly and he hands the report to KIRK*) the something——

KIRK: Judging from the hæmorrhagic effusion into the cortex.

PETER (*abstractedly*): In the vulgar tongue, the amount of bleeding in the brain. What?

HARRIET: Yes; but *when* did all this happen?

KIRK: That's what we've got to find out. Some time last Wednesday night by the looks of it. After dark, I reckon, by what your man says about the candles.

PETER: A week ago. Say after half past seven, then.

KIRK: Well, we'd better have that fellow Crutchley in. He seems to have been the last person to see the deceased alive.

PETER: And therefore the obvious suspect.

HARRIET: And consequently innocent—in books.

PETER: Shall we make ourselves scarce?

KIRK: That's as you like, my lord. I'd be glad enough if you'd stay. You might give me a bit of help. We don't get much practice in this sort of thing down here. Not but what it's a kind of busman's holiday for you. (PETER *takes a cigarette, and fumbles for matches.*)

PETER: Busman's honeymoon, so to speak. All right. I'll do my best. No objection to smoking in court, I take it! Where the devil did I put the matches?

SELLON: Here you are, my lord. (*Produces match-box and strikes match for PETER, which he does with his left-hand.*)

PETER: Hullo! You're left-handed.

SELLON: For some things, my lord. Not writing.

KIRK: Why, so you are, Joe. I hope you ain't this tall, left-handed murderer what we're looking out for.

SELLON: No, sir.

KIRK (*laughing heartily*): A pretty thing that 'ud be, wouldn't it? We shouldn't never hear the last of that. Now, you hop out and get Crutchley. (*Exit SELLON.*) Nice lad he is. 'Ard-working. I sometimes think his heart ain't rightly in his work these days. Married too young, that's what it is, and started a family, which is a 'andicap to a young officer.

PETER: All this matrimony is a great mistake. (*Hand on HARRIET's shoulder.*)

HARRIET: Well, I warned you!

PETER. You did. (*Enter CRUTCHLEY and SELLON, back.*)

KIRK: Ah! that's right. Sit down, my lad. (*CRUTCHLEY sits on the chair SELLON has been using. SELLON remains standing, down-stage, beside the radio.*) Now then, Crutchley, what's your first name?

CRUTCHLEY: Frank.

KIRK: Frank Crutchley. Gardener here, ain't you?

CRUTCHLEY: One day a week, that's all. Five bob.

KIRK: What do you do the rest of the time?

CRUTCHLEY: Odd jobs. Mostly I drive a lorry for Mr. 'Ancock at the garridge over at Pagford, where I lodges. And taxi-work and such. Saving up, I was, to get started with a garridge of my own, only for that forty pound Mr. Noakes had off of me——

KIRK: Never mind that now. That's gone west, that has, and it's no use crying over spilt milk.

CRUTCHLEY: He promised he'd let me have it when I came to-day.

KIRK: Well, I dare say he might have, if somebody hadn't butted in and brained him. You

ought to a-been smarter and got it out of him last week.

CRUTCHLEY: He hadn't got it then.

KIRK: Oh, hadn't he? That's all you know about it.

CRUTCHLEY: Cripes! You don't mean to tell me——

KIRK: He had. (CRUTCHLEY looks frantically to PETER and HARRIET as if for confirmation. PETER nods.)

HARRIET: Yes, Crutchley. I'm afraid he had the money on him all the time.

CRUTCHLEY: What! He had the money—you found it on him——

KIRK: Well, we did; there's no call to make a secret of it.

CRUTCHLEY: Mean to say, if he hadn't been killed, I might have had my money?

PETER (*emphatically*): Certainly you could. (*He and KIRK understand one another.*)

CRUTCHLEY: God! I'll—I'll—I'd like to——

KIRK: Yes, yes. I dare say. Well, now's your opportunity. Any facts you can give us——

CRUTCHLEY: Facts? I've been done out of my money, that's what it is, and I——

PETER: See here, Crutchley. We know you've had a rotten deal, but that can't be helped. The man who killed Mr. Noakes did you a bad turn, and he's the man we're after. Use your wits and see if you can't help us to get even with him.

CRUTCHLEY: Ah! (*His face is eagerly illuminated as he grasps the situation.*)

KIRK: Thank you, my lord. That's about the size of it, and put very plain. Now, my lad,

we're sorry about your money, but it's up to you to give us a hand. See?

CRUTCHLEY (*eagerly*): Yes. Right-oh! What do you want to know?

KIRK (*with a glance at PETER; they have now got their witness going*): Well, first of all—when did you last see Mr. Noakes?

CRUTCHLEY: Wednesday evening, same as I said. I finished up my work just before six, came in 'ere to do the pots; and when I done them 'e gave me five bob, and I started askin' 'im for me forty pound.

KIRK: Where was that? In here?

CRUTCHLEY (*shakes his head*): Kitchen. 'E always sat there. I put the steps away—

KIRK: Steps? What d'you want steps for?

CRUTCHLEY (*pointing to hanging cactus*): That. (*Points to cactus hanging in window.*) And that. And the clock. I wind it each week. Can't reach any of them.

KIRK: And Mr. Noakes was alone in the kitchen when you went out?

CRUTCHLEY: Yes. 'E wasn't the sort people dropped in for a chat with.

KIRK: What did he say when you asked him for your money?

CRUTCHLEY: Promised 'e'd let me 'ave it next time I came. That's to-day. I might a-known 'e never meant it. Wasn't the first time 'e'd promised, and then always 'ad some excuse—

KIRK (*interrupting*): Well, then what happened?

CRUTCHLEY: Then I went: and I 'eard 'im lock the door after me.

KIRK: Which door?

CRUTCHLEY: The back door. He mostly used that. The front door was always kept locked.

KIRK: Spring lock?

CRUTCHLEY: No. Ordin'ry mortice. Had to be locked or unlocked with the key.

KIRK: Was the key ever left in the lock?

CRUTCHLEY: No. 'E kept it on 'is bunch.

PETER: It certainly wasn't in the lock last night. We got in by the front.

KIRK: Well now, to get back. You went off—what time was that?

CRUTCHLEY: Well, I dunno. Must a-been getting on for twenty past. Anyway, it was ten past when I wound that clock, and it keeps good time. (*They all consult their watches.*)

KIRK (*consulting watch*): It's right now.

PETER (*to HARRIET*): My watch has stopped. I must have forgotten to wind it last night in all the excitement.

KIRK: Was that clock going when you got here last night, d'you know?

PETER: I can't remember. I rather fancy it was. (*The question stops him just as he is starting to wind his own watch and he forgets about it.*)

HARRIET: Yes, it was. I noticed it. And it was right then.

CRUTCHLEY: Yes; it's an eight-day. It was going right enough this morning when I wound it.

KIRK: Now, just as a matter of form, what did you do when you left here?

CRUTCHLEY: Went straight round to choir practice.

KIRK: Choir practice, eh? Ought to be easy enough to check up on that. And then?

CRUTCHLEY: Vicar asked me to drive his car over to Pagford for him. I had my supper over there at the Pig and Whistle and had a look-on at the Darts Match. Mr. Puffett can tell you. He was there. Vicar give him a lift over.

PETER: Mr. Puffett a darts player?

CRUTCHLEY: Ex-champion. And still throws a tidy dart.

PETER: Ah! it's the power he puts behind it, no doubt. (PETER throws stub of cigarette "*powerfully*" into the fire.)

KIRK: We'll see him presently. Did you bring Mr. Goodacre back?

CRUTCHLEY: Yes. Half past ten I got him home, just after. Then I went back to Pagford on my bike. Got in just on eleven and went to bed.

KIRK: Where do you sleep?

CRUTCHLEY: 'Ancock's garridge. Along with their other chap Williams. (*Enter PUFFETT, back.*) You ask Williams; he can tell you.

PUFFETT: Excuse me, but I can't do nothing with this 'erc kitchen pot. Will you 'ave the reverend's gun, my lord, or shall I fetch the ladders afore it gets dark?

HARRIET: Oh, dear! I wonder if we'd better leave it till to-morrow?

PUFFETT: I don't mind tellin' you, me lady, Mr. Bunter's fair put out, thinkin' 'e'll 'ave to cook your dinner on that there perishin' little oil-stove. (*HARRIET gets up.*)

HARRIET: All right, Mr. Puffett, I'd better come and talk to Bunter, and see what he says.

PUFFETT (*holding door for her*): Thank you, me lady.

KIRK: Just a moment, Puffett. Crutchley here says he was at choir practice last Wednesday

night. Do you know anything about that?
(Exit HARRIET.)

PUFFETT: That's right, Mr. Kirk. 'E were there.
'Arf past six to 'arf past seven. 'Arvest anthem.
(Sings) "For 'Is mercies still endure, Ever
faithful, ever sure." That's right enough.

CRUTCHLEY: And you see me round at the Pig,
too.

PUFFETT: 'Course I did. I wasn't blind. You was
eating bread an' cheese and you 'ad four and
a 'arf pints, cause I counted 'em. Drownd
yerself one o' these days, I reckon.

KIRK: Was Crutchley there all the time?

PUFFETT: Till closin'. Ten o'clock. And then
we 'ad to go round to fetch Mr. Goodacre back
from his whist drive. Ain't that right, Frank?

CRUTCHLEY: That's right.

KIRK: Very good. That's all I wanted to know.

PUFFETT: I'll be seeing about them ladders,
then. (Exit PUFFETT, closing door after him.)

KIRK: Well, Crutchley, that seems straight
enough. Have you any keys to this house?

CRUTCHLEY: Not me. Aggie Twitterton's got
one for the front door.

PETER: By the way, Super, did you find the
front door key on the body?

KIRK: Here's his bunch. (Pulls it out of his
pocket.)

PETER (taking key out of his own pocket): Yes.
Here you are. (Hands key over.)

KIRK: Did you come back here at any time
during the week?

CRUTCHLEY: No; Wednesday's my day.

KIRK: And you can't give us any further
information?

CRUTCHLEY: Not a thing.

PETER: By the way, Crutchley, do you know anything about a note-case Mr. Noakes lost some time ago? Bunter gathered that there had been some trouble.

CRUTCHLEY: I know he made a hell of a fuss, that's all. Ten pounds he had in it, so he said. If he'd lost forty pounds—

KIRK: That'll do. Do you know anything about that, Joe?

SELLON: No, sir. Except it wasn't found. We made out he must have dropped it out of his pocket in the road.

CRUTCHLEY: All the same, he had new locks put on the doors. Two years ago, that was. You ask Ma Ruddle about that.

KIRK: Well, if it was two years ago, I can't see that it's got anything to do with this.

PETER: No. Only it suggests why Mr. Noakes was so careful about locking up and all that.

KIRK: Yes. All right, Crutchley. That'll do for the moment. Stay about in case you're wanted.

CRUTCHLEY: It's my day 'ere. I'm workin' in the garden. (*Exit CRUTCHLEY.*)

KIRK (*after door has closed*): Well—it don't seem as if it could be him. Him and Puffett are alibis for one another.

PETER: Puffett? Puffett is his own best alibi. The man of upright soul and humour placid needs no blunt instruments nor prussic acid. (*KIRK looks up inquiringly.*) Odes of Horace: Wimsey's translation.

KIRK: Is that so? Then Puffett's word is good enough to let out Crutchley. Not but what he couldn't have done it after. Next day even.

M

PETER: Or *before*. At six o'clock, when they had words about the money.

KIRK: Don't fit in with the candles.

PETER: No. I suppose we must accept the evidence of the candles. (*Reluctantly, as though not sure that this evidence may not bear another interpretation.*)

KIRK: Either way, though, *he* wouldn't have missed the cash.

PETER: No. It almost looks as if the murder wasn't committed for money. Yet it's not easy to see any other motive. (*He eyes KIRK quizzically.*)

KIRK (*missing the proffered opportunity*): That's the funny thing about it.

PETER (*giving him the lead*): By the way, if Mr. Noakes had had any money to leave, who would have come in for it?

KIRK: Ah! We've got that. Found this bit of a will in his bedroom. (*Taking paper from pocket*) "After payment of my just debts——"

PETER: Cynical old blighter!

KIRK: "All I die possessed of to my niece and sole surviving relative, Agnes Twitterton." (*PETER frowns.*) That surprise you?

PETER: No, why should it?

KIRK: What did Miss Twitterton say to Mr. MacBride's revelations?

PETER: Er—well! She went off the deep end—naturally.

KIRK: Seemed a bit of a blow, eh?

PETER: Oh!—not more than you might expect.

KIRK: And what did she say when your man found the body?

PETER: Oh, er—she shrieked a bit and—all that, you know.

KIRK: Did she say anything particular, besides shrieking? (PETER *hesitates*.) See here, my lord, I've heard one or two things from the other people.

PETER: Then why don't you ask them?

KIRK: I'm going to. Joe, ask Mr. MacBride to step here a minute. (*Exit SELLON*.) Now, my lord, you're a gentleman, and you've got your feelings. I know all that, and it does you credit. But I'm a police officer, and I can't afford to indulge in feelings. They're a privilege of the upper classes.

PETER: Upper classes be damned.

KIRK: Now, MacBride, he's no class at all. If I asked you, I know you'd tell the truth, but it might 'urt you. Now I can get it out of MacBride; and it won't 'urt him in the least.

PETER: I see. Painless extractions a speciality. (*Enter MACBRIDE*.)

KIRK: Oh, Mr. MacBride. There's just one other thing. Did you happen to notice what effect the discovery of the body had upon the family and friends, so to speak?

MACBRIDE: Well, they were upset, who wouldn't be?

KIRK: Remember anything special said?

MACBRIDE: Well—the gardener chap—Crutchley—he went white as a sheet he did—and the old gentleman was badly put about—the niece had hysterics—but *she* didn't seem as much surprised as the rest, did she? (*Turning to PETER, who walks away up-stage to window. He picks up matches from settle as he passes and pockets them.*)

KIRK: What do you mean?

MACBRIDE: Well—when the servant came in and said they'd found Mr. Noakes, she yelled out at once: "Oh, Uncle's dead!"

PETER (*turns*): She could tell that from Bunter's manner. At least, I could.

KIRK: Anything else?

MACBRIDE: Then she said: "Uncle's dead and all the money's gone." Nothing like £ s. d. for going straight to the heart, is there? (*GOODACRE hurries past the window.*)

PETER: Nothing. You, if I recollect rightly, asked whether they'd found any money on the corpse.

MACBRIDE: Quite right. (*With dignity*) But then, you see, he wasn't my uncle! We Jews think a good deal of that.

PETER (*seriously*): I beg your pardon. Your profession must give you some curious sidelights on Christian family life. What do you think of it?

MACBRIDE (*getting his blow home*): Not much. (*PETER takes the count.*)

KIRK (*understanding nothing of this little passage of arms*): H'm. Well. Thank you, Mr. MacBride.

MACBRIDE: I say, Mr. Superintendent, are you going to want me any more?

KIRK: You mean you want to get back to Town?

MACBRIDE: That's right.

KIRK: Yes. Well, that's O.K. We've got your address, haven't we?

SELLON: Yes, sir.

KIRK: Very well, Mr. MacBride. And thank you.

MACBRIDE: I'll say good day then, and be getting along. (*Going*) Oh, I say, Mr. Superintendent—the police will be in charge here for the next few days, I suppose?

KIRK: Yes. Why?

MACBRIDE: So long as somebody's keeping an eye on the stuff—see what I mean? 'Afternoon. (*Exit MACBRIDE.*)

KIRK (*a slight pause after the door has shut*): That right, my lord?

PETER: Quite right.

KIRK: Ah! Well, I think we'll have to see Miss Twitterton.

PETER: I'll get my wife to fetch her down. (*Exit PETER, back. SELLON sits down beside KIRK again.*)

KIRK (*sitting back in his chair*): That's a real nice gentleman, Joe. Out o' the top drawer. Well eddicated, too. But he sees which way the wind's blowing and he don't like it. Small blame to him.

SELLON: But he can't think Aggie Twitterton coshed old Noakes on the 'ead with a mallet.

KIRK: You never know, my lad. The female of the species is more deadly than the male. (*He pauses, and makes a note.*) Rudyard Kipling. Don't you see, if Noakes was killed for what he had to leave——

SELLON: But he hadn't nothing to leave.

KIRK: *We* know that. But *she* didn't. And *if* he was murdered for what he had to *leave*, that 'ud explain why the £650 wasn't took off of the body. Probably she didn't know it was there, and, if she did, it 'ud all be hers in the end. Use your brains, Joe Sellon. (*Enter HARRIET with GOODACRE.*)

HARRIET: I think Mr. Goodacre has something he wants to say to you, Superintendent. (*Crosses to staircase L.*)

GOODACRE: Dear me. Well. Yes. I came back to see if you wanted me for anything, and to tell Miss Twitterton I've spoken to Lugg about the

—er—the coffin; and Crutchley spoke to me as I came up the path.

KIRK: What did he say?

GOODACRE: Well, I think he thinks he might be suspected. But I assure you, Superintendent, that I can confirm his alibi in every particular. He was at choir practice from 6.30 to 7.30, and then he took me over to Pagford and fetched me back here at 10.30. So you see—

KIRK: That's all right, sir. If an alibi's wanted for those times, you and him's out of it.

GOODACRE: I'm out of it? Bless my soul, Superintendent—

KIRK: Only my joke, sir.

GOODACRE: Yes, yes. Well, I hope I may assure Crutchley that it's all right. He's a young man of whom I have a very good opinion. So keen and industrious. You mustn't attach too much importance to his chagrin about his forty pounds. It's a considerable sum for a man in his position.

KIRK: Don't you worry, sir. Very glad to have your confirmation of those times.

GOODACRE: Yes, yes—I thought I'd better mention it. Now, is there anything else I can do to help?

KIRK: Well, thank you, sir, I think not. Not for the present, anyway. Much obliged, I'm sure.

GOODACRE: Then I mustn't waste any more of your valuable time. Good morning, Superintendent.

KIRK: Good *afternoon*, sir.

GOODACRE (*at door*): What? Oh, yes, of course, it would be.

[*Exit GOODACRE, back.*]

KIRK: Now, what makes the old gentleman so sure that those *are* the essential times? *We* don't know they are.

SELLON: No, sir.

KIRK: Seems very excited about it. It can't hardly be him, though, come to think of it, he's *tall* enough.

SELLON: I'm sure it couldn't be vicar, sir.

KIRK: Isn't that just what I'm saying? (*Enter HARRIET with Miss TWITTERTON.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, please don't leave me, Lady Peter. (*SELLON gets up and brings another chair up to table.*)

HARRIET: No, no.

KIRK: Please sit down, Miss Twitterton. Nothing to be alarmed about. Now, first of all, I understand you knew nothing whatever about your uncle's arrangement with Lord Peter Wimsey—selling the house and all that? (*HARRIET sits in armchair.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Not a thing. I was never so surprised in my life.

KIRK: When had you seen him last?

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, not for—(*counts on fingers*)—not for about ten days. I looked in last Sunday week after morning service. I come over, you see, to play the organ for the dear vicar—it's a *tiny* church of course, and *not* many people—and I called on Uncle then, and he seemed *quite* as usual . . . and . . . that's the . . . last time I saw him. Oh, dear.

KIRK: Quite so. Were you aware that he was absent from home ever since last Wednesday?

MISS TWITTERTON: No—I didn't know. He usually tells—told me. But of course it was quite an ordinary thing for him to be away at Broxford. I mean, if I had known, I shouldn't have been surprised.

KIRK: You have a key for the front door, haven't you?

MISS TWITTERTON (*extracting keys with difficulty from capacious skirt-pocket*): Oh, yes. I gave it to Lord Peter last night. I always carry it with my own. They *never* leave me. (*Hands bunch to him.*)

KIRK: Is this it? (*Holds up key PETER gave him.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Well, it *must* be, mustn't it, if Lord Peter gave it to you?

KIRK: You haven't ever lent it to anybody?

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, dear, no!

KIRK: Nor left it about where it might be pinched or borrowed? (*Hands ring back to her.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: No, never.

KIRK: Where do you keep your keys at night?

MISS TWITTERTON: *Always* in my bedroom. The keys, and dear Mother's silver tea-pot and Aunt Sophy's cruet that was a wedding present to grandpa and grandma. I take them up with me *every* night and put them on the little table by my bed, with the dinner-bell handy in case of fire. And I'm *sure* nobody could come in when I was asleep, because I always put a deck-chair across the head of the stairs. (*PETER is seen outside the window. He comes up to it and peers in, as though trying to see what is happening. HARRIET beckons to him.*)

KIRK: A deck-chair?

MISS TWITTERTON: To trip up a burglar. It's a *splendid* thing. You see, while he was getting all entangled and making a noise, I should hear him and ring the dinner-bell out of the window for the police.

HARRIET: Dear me, Miss Twitterton—how dreadfully ruthless of you. The poor man might have broken his neck.

MISS TWITTERTON: What man?

HARRIET: The burglar.

MISS TWITTERTON: But, dear Lady Peter, I'm trying to explain—there never *was* a burglar.

KIRK (*interrupting*): Well, it doesn't look as though anybody else could have got at the keys. Now, Miss Twitterton—about these money difficulties of your uncle's—

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, dear, oh, dear! I knew nothing about those. It gave me such a shock. Everybody thought Uncle was very well off. (*PETER enters quietly and stands by the radio. While he does so he consults clock and winds and sets his watch by it.*)

KIRK: Did he make a will, do you know?

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, yes, I'm sure he made a will. Not that it would have mattered, because I was the only one of the family left. But I'm sure he told me he'd made one. He always said, when I was worried about things—of course I'm not very well off—he always said, "Now, don't you be in a hurry, Aggie. I can't help you now, because it's all tied up in the business, but it'll come to you after I'm dead."

KIRK: I see. You never thought he might change his mind?

MISS TWITTERTON: Why, no. I'm *quite* sure he meant me to have everything. Who else *should* he leave it to? I'm the only one. I suppose now there won't be anything?

KIRK: I'm afraid it doesn't look like it.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, dear? I'm afraid it looks dreadful to be thinking about money just now—but—I did think I'd have a little for my old age—and times are so hard—and—and—there's always the rent—

HARRIET: I'm sure something will turn up. (*Gets up and goes over to her.*)

KIRK (*irresistibly*): Micawber.

MISS TWITTERTON: Beg pardon? I had counted on it—rather specially— (*She is on the verge of tears, and everybody is getting uncomfortable.*)

PETER (*offering handkerchief from his pocket*): It's quite clean.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, thank you, Lord Peter.

HARRIET: Do you want Miss Twitterton any more, Mr. Kirk? Because I really think—

KIRK: If Miss Twitterton wouldn't mind telling me where she was last Wednesday evening—just a matter of form, you understand—

MISS TWITTERTON (*blowing her nose and returning the handkerchief to PETER, who puts it in the what-not*): But Wednesday is *always* choir practice—

KIRK: And after that?

MISS TWITTERTON: Why, I went home, of course.

KIRK: And then?

MISS TWITTERTON: Then I had my supper. And then I had half a dozen fowls to kill and pluck before I went to bed.

HARRIET: You don't mean to say you kill them yourself? (*KIRK gives a hearty guffaw, and MISS TWITTERTON looks at her in mild surprise.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, yes; it's *so* much easier than you'd think.

PETER: My dear girl, wringing necks is just a knack. (*He mimes the process.*)

KIRK: That's right. Wring 'em or string 'em up—(*and he mimes the hanging as he speaks*)—it's the sharp jerk does it. (*MISS TWITTERTON gives a squeak of fright, and HARRIET's expression comments unmistakably on that particular kind of masculine humour.*)

PETER: Steady on, Super; we're alarming the ladies.

KIRK (*jovially*): Dear dear, that'll never do. Well—thank you, Miss Twitterton. I think that's all for the moment.

HARRIET: That's all right, then. It's all over. (Miss TWITTERTON *gets up*.) Come along and see how Mr. Puffett is getting on with the kitchen chimney. And I want you to show me where some of the things are kept. (*She steers her out past PETER, with whom she exchanges a glance.*)

KIRK: Oh! and, my lady; would you mind telling Mrs. Ruddle she's wanted? (*To SELLON*) We must get those times straightened out a bit. (*Exeunt HARRIET and MISS TWITTERTON.*)

PETER: Well, she was quite frank about that.

KIRK: Yes, my lord. She knew about it all right. (*Shakes head.*) A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

PETER: Not knowledge. Learning. A little learning—Alexander Pope!

KIRK: Is that so? I must make a note of that. Ah! Well, it don't *look* as if anyone else could have got hold of this key; but you never know.

PETER: I think Miss Twitterton was telling the truth.

KIRK: Reckon there's several kinds o' truth, my lord. There's truth as far as you knows it. And there's truth as far as you're asked it. But they don't represent the whole truth, necessarily. F'rinstance, I never asked that little lady if she locked up this house for someone else, did I? All I said was, "When did you last see your fa—your uncle?" See?

PETER: Yes. I see. In fact, personally I always prefer *not* to have a key to the house in which they've discovered the corpse. (*Enter MRS. RUDDLE.*)

MRS. RUDDLE: Did you want me, mister?

KIRK: Yes. We wanted to fix up a bit more exactly about the time of the crime. Now, Crutchley saw Mr. Noakes alive and well at about twenty past six. You came up next morning and found the house shut up.

MRS. RUDDLE: That's right. 'Ar-pas'-seven as usual. And I says, "Drat the man, he's gone off to Broxford." Thinkin' he'd a-taken the 10 o'clock 'bus the night before.

KIRK: I see. And what did you do then?

MRS. RUDDLE: Told the baker and milkman not to call. And left a note in the door tellin' the postman to bring 'is letters down to me. There wasn't only two and they was bills, so I didn't send 'em on.

PETER: That's the right way with bills.

KIRK: When this gentleman came for you last night and let you into the house, how did you find it?

MRS. RUDDLE: Same as usual.

KIRK: Nothing out of place?

MRS. RUDDLE: No. Exceptin' 'is dirty supper-things all left out on the kitchen table. 'E always 'ad 'is supper at 'ar-pas'-seven regular. Then 'e'd set in the kitchen with the paper till 'e came in 'ere for the noos at 9.30. Very regular 'e was.

KIRK: So he'd had his supper. Had his bed been slept in?

MRS. RUDDLE: No, it 'adn't. But of course I put on clean sheets for the lady and gentleman. I 'ope I knows what's proper.

KIRK: Well, that helps us a lot. Mr. Noakes ate his supper at 7.30, so he was presumably alive then. He didn't go to bed—so—when did he usually go to bed, Mrs. Ruddle?

MRS. RUDDLE: Eleven o'clock, sir, regular as

clockwork, 'e'd switch off the wireless, and I'd see 'is candle go upstairs to bed. I can see 'is bedroom from my back window, clear enough.

KIRK: Ah? Now, Mrs. Ruddle, just you cast your mind back to last Wednesday night. Do you recollect seeing his candle go upstairs?

MRS. RUDDLE: Well, there! Now you comes to mention of it, Mr. Kirk, I did not. (Kirk *shows interest.*) Which I remember saying to my Bert only the next day, "There! if I'd only kep' awake, I mighter known 'e'd gone off, seein' 'is bedroom winder dark—but there!" I says, "I was that wore out I dropped off the moment me 'ead was on the pillar." (Kirk *is disappointed.*)

KIRK: It don't really matter, seein' as his bed wasn't slept in, it's likely he was downstairs when——

MRS. RUDDLE: Oh, lor'! Mr. Kirk. There now!

KIRK: Have you thought of something?

MRS. RUDDLE: Why, of course. I don't know how it didn't come into me 'ead before, but I been that moithered with all these dretful things a-'appenin'. Of course, if 'e wasn't off by the 'bus, then 'e must a-been dead afore 'ar-pas'-nine. (*Her voice gets more and more awestruck.*)

KIRK: What makes you think that?

MRS. RUDDLE: W'y, 'is wireless wasn't a-workin', and I says to Bert——

KIRK: Just a minute. What's all this about the wireless?

MRS. RUDDLE: Why, Mr. Kirk, if Mr. Noakes 'ad been 'ere alive, 'e wouldn't a-missed the 9.30 poos, not if it was ever so. And I recollects sayin' to Bert last Wednesday night as ever was, "Funny thing," I says, "Mr. Noakes ain't got 'is wireless goin' to-night. That ain't like 'im," I says.

KIRK: But you couldn't hear his wireless from your cottage with all these doors and windows shut?

MRS. RUDDLE: Well, I won't deceive you, Mr. Kirk. I did just run over 'ere a few minutes arter the 'arf-hour to borror a drop o' paraffin from 'is shed. And if the wireless 'ad been on then I couldn't a-'elped 'earin' of it, for them walls at the back ain't only plaster and 'e allus 'ad it a-roarin' powerful 'ard on account o' bein' 'ard of 'earin'.

KIRK: Oh, I see.

MRS. RUDDLE: No 'arm in borrowin' a drop o' paraffin!

KIRK: Well, that's neither here nor there. Nine-thirty news. That's on the National.

MRS. RUDDLE: That's right. 'E never troubled with the six o'clock. (PETER opens radio lid and looks in.)

PETER: The pointer's set to Regional.

KIRK: Looks like he didn't have it on—not for the 9.30. H'm. We're getting on. Dead or unconscious afore 9.30—last seen alive at, say, 6.20—ate his supper—

MRS. RUDDLE: Six-twenty? Go on—he was alive and kicking at 9 o'clock.

KIRK: How do you know?

MRS. RUDDLE: 'Cause I seen 'im. 'Ere! Whatter you gettin' at? Tryin' to put summat on me? You knows as well as I do 'e was alive at nine. W'y, Joe Sellon 'ere was a-talkin' to 'im.

KIRK: Eh? (*Stares at SELLO.*)

SELLO: Yes, that's right.

MRS. RUDDLE: 'Course it is. You don't catch me that way, Joe Sellon. I come in 9 o'clock

from fetchin' a pail of water—always free permission to use the pump—and I sees you plain as the nose on my face a-talkin' to 'im at this very winder. Ah ! and I 'eard you too. Usin' language—you did oughter be ashamed of yourself—not fit for a decent woman to listen to. (PETER at once sees the implication of this. KIRK is absorbed in the dereliction of duty.)

KIRK (*obviously uneasy, but covering up as best he can*): All right, ma—we just wanted a bit of confirmation on that there point. Nine o'clock, you say it was ?

MRS. RUDDLE: Near as makes no difference. My clock said ten past, but it gains a bit. Ask Joe Sellon. If you want to know the time ask a pleeceman.

KIRK (*hastily*): Right. That gets us pretty near the time. Much obliged. Now, just you run along and—see here—don't you get shooting your mouth off.

MRS. RUDDLE: I'm sure I ain't one to talk. (*Offended.*)

PETER: You see, Mrs. Ruddie, you're a very important witness, and there might be all sorts of newspaper reporters trying to wheedle things out of you. So you must be very sharp with them—otherwise you might make things difficult for Mr. Kirk.

MRS. RUDDLE: I 'ope I knows better than to go talkin' to noospaper men. A nasty, vulgar lot.

PETER (*gently leading her to the door, back*): That's splendid. I know we can rely on you. (*Exit MRS. RUDDLE.*)

KIRK: Now, Joe Sellon. What's the meaning of this ?

SELLON: Well, sir——

KIRK: I'm disappointed in you, Joe. I'm astonished. Mean to say you was there at 9

o'clock talking to Mr. Noakes and you said nothin' about it? Ain't you got no sense of duty?

SELLON: I'm sure I'm very sorry, sir.

KIRK: *Sorry!* That's a nice word to use. You—a police officer! With'oldin' important evidence! And say you're sorry! (*PETER strolls over to the window and looks out while this official reprimand is going on.*)

SELLON: I didn't mean—I didn't know that old cat had seen me——

KIRK: What the hell does it matter who saw you? You ought to have told me first thing. . . . My God, Joe Sellon, I don't know what to make of you. Upon my word, I don't. . . . You're for it, my lad. (*PETER takes match-box out of pocket and tosses it meditatively into his left hand. He jerks it into the air once or twice.*)

SELLON (*twists his hands unhappily, but seems unable to make any answer; mumbles*): I'm sorry——

KIRK: Now, look here. What were you doing there, that you didn't want anybody to know about? . . . Speak up! . . . (*The click of the match-box catches his ear and he looks at PETER.*) . . . Wait a minute. Wait a minute. . . . (*So KIRK has seen it at last. PETER turns round, and puts his matches into his left-hand pocket.*) You're left-handed, aren't you?

SELLON: Oh, my God, sir, my God! I never done it! I swear I never done it! 'Eaven knows I 'ad cause enough, but I never done it—I never laid 'and on 'im—— (*PETER comes down.*)

KIRK: Cause? What cause? . . . Come on, now. Out with it. What were you doing with Mr. Noakes?

SELLON (*looking round wildly*): I never touched 'im. I never done nothing to him. If I was to die the next minute, sir, I'm innocent——

KIRK: What were you doing up here at 9 o'clock?

SELLON: Nothin'. (*Stubbornly*) Only to pass the time o' day.

KIRK: Time o' day!

PETER: Look here, Sellon, what's the good of this? You'd much better make a clean breast of it to Mr. Kirk. Whatever it is.

KIRK: This is a nice thing, this is. A police officer——

PETER: Go easy with him, Super. He's only a youngster. I'll just push along into the garden.

SELLON: Oh, my God, sir! Don't go, my lord, don't you go! I've made a damn' bloody fool of myself.

PETER: We all do that at times.

SELLON: You'll believe me, my lord. (*PETER glances at KIRK and sits on table.*) Oh, God, this'll break me.

KIRK: I shouldn't wonder.

PETER: Pull yourself together, Sellon. Mr. Kirk's not the kind of man to be hard or unjust to anybody. Now, what was it all about?

SELLON: Well—(*gulps*)—that there note-case of Mr. Noakes's—what he lost——

KIRK: Two years ago—well, what about it?

SELLON: I found it. (*Dead silence.*) I—I—he'd dropped it in the road—ten pound it had in it—I—my wife was desperate bad after the baby—doctor said she ought to have special treatment—I hadn't saved nothing—and the pay's not much, nor the allowance—I been a damned fool—I meant to put it back right away—I thought he could spare it, being well off. I know we're supposed to be honest, but it's a hell of a temptation in a man's way.

PETER: Yes. A generous country expects a lot of honesty for two or three pounds a week.

KIRK: Well, I'm——

PETER: What happened about it, Sellon?

SELLON: He found out, sir. I don't know how. But he did. Threatened to report me. Well, of course, that 'ud a-been the end of me. Out of a job, and who'd a-given me work after that? So I 'ad to pay 'im what he said, to stop his tongue.

PETER: *Pay him?*

KIRK: That's blackmail. It's an indictable offence.

SELLON: Call it what you like, sir—it was life and death to me. Five bob a week he been bleeding me for these last two years——

PETER: Great God!

SELLON: And I tell you, my lord, when I came *in this room this morning and heard as he was dead*—it was like a breath of 'Eaven to me. . . . But I didn't kill him—I swear I didn't. . . . You do believe me? My lord, *you* believe me! I didn't do it.

PETER: I couldn't blame you if you had.

SELLON: But I didn't. It's all right, sir. I know I been a fool—and worse—and I'll take my medicine, but as sure as I stand here, I didn't kill Mr. Noakes.

KIRK: Well, Joe, it's bad enough without that. You've been a fool and no mistake. . . . Well . . . we'll have to see about that later. You'd better tell us now what *did* happen.

SELLON: I came up to see him, to tell him I hadn't got the money that week. He laughed in my face, the old devil. I——

KIRK: What time was this?

SELLON: I came up here by the path and I looked in at that there window. The curtains wasn't drawn and it was all dark. Only then I see him comin' in from the kitchen with a candle in his hand. He holds the candle up to the clock there, and I see it was five minutes past nine.

PETER: You saw the clock from the window? *(He pauses. It is counsel's pause before warning the witness to be careful; and KIRK's face shows that he recognises its significance.)* You're sure?

SELLON: Yes, my lord. Then he comes over to draw the curtains and I taps on the window and he opens it. I tells him I ain't got the money and he laughs at me, nasty-like. "All right," he says, "I'll report you in the morning." So then I plucks up 'eart and says to him, "You can't. It's blackmail. All this money you been taking off of me is blackmail." And he says, "Money? you can't prove you ever paid me money. Where's your reccipts? You got nothin' on paper." So I swears at him. "Get out," he says, and slams the window shut. I tried the door but it was locked. So I gets out, and that's the last I seen of him.

KIRK: You didn't go into the house?

SELLON: No, sir.

KIRK: Are you telling all the truth?

SELLON: Honest to God, I am, sir.

PETER: Sellon, are you sure?

SELLON: It's God's truth, my lord. *(Pause.)*

KIRK: H'm, well. I don't rightly know what to say. *(PETER goes up to fireplace.)* See here, Joe. You better go over straight away to Pagford and check up that alibi for Crutchley.

SELLON: Very good, sir.

KIRK: I'll talk to you when you come back.

SELLON; Very good, sir. (*He looks at PETER, who is staring into the fireplace and makes no movement.*) I hope you won't be too hard on me, sir.

KIRK: That's as may be. (*Exit SELLON.*) Well, what do you think of that?

PETER (*comes down*): It sounded straight enough, as far as the note-case was concerned. (*Short pause.*) So there's a motive for you, all alive and kicking. Widens your field a bit, doesn't it, Super? Blackmailers don't as a rule stop at one victim—

KIRK (*hardly listening; hammering on at his own worry*): Why couldn't the young fool have come to his Sergeant or me if he was short? This is the devil and all. Beats me altogether. I wouldn't have believed it.

PETER: There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio—

KIRK (*automatically*): William Shakespeare—Hamlet.

PETER: "Hamlet." (*Striding up and down.*) By God, you're right. "Village or hamlet of this merry land." Stir up the mud of the village pond and the stink will surprise you. (*He stops abruptly at KIRK's side.*) Look here. You've had no official information about that theft, have you? And it was paid back twice over.

KIRK: It's easy enough for you to be soft 'earted, my lord. It ain't your responsibility. Coo! that there Noakes—he must a-been a proper old twister.

PETER: It's a damned ugly story. It's enough to make a man— Oh, hell!

KIRK: What's up?

PETER: Superintendent, I'm sorry for that poor devil, but—curse it! I've got to say it—

KIRK: Well?

PETER: That story of his. It sounded all right.

KIRK: Yes.

PETER: But it wasn't. One bit of it was a lie——

KIRK: A lie?

PETER: Yes.

KIRK: What do you mean?

PETER: He said he never came into the house.

KIRK: Well?

PETER: He said he saw the clock from that window.

KIRK: Well?

PETER: I tried to do the same thing just now when I was out in the garden and wanted to set my watch.

KIRK: Well?

PETER: It can't be done, that's all. That damned awful cactus is in the way.

KIRK: What? (*He starts to his feet.*)

PETER: I say, that infernal bloody cactus is in the way. It covers the face of the clock. You can't see the time from that window.

KIRK: You can't? (*Moves quickly up-stage to test for himself.*)

PETER: No. It's absolutely and definitely impossible. You can not see the clock from that window.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

The same: about 6.30 on Thursday evening. A cheerful fire blazes on the hearth, but the window-curtains are drawn back, and the window is open to the air of a clear autumn evening. It is already fairly dark in the room, but quite light outside. The room is lit by several paraffin lamps.

BUNTER is tidying. He picks up "*The Times*," "*Punch*," "*Vogue*," a novel in a black-and-yellow jacket, a small calf-bound volume, two tennis-racquets, a long woollen scarf, and a beret, which are lying in a distracted way in various parts of the room, puts the books and papers on the whatnot, stands the racquets in a corner, and puts the garments aside ready to be taken upstairs. The round table is mid-stage L., as in last scene; but the armchair has been moved down-stage R. There is a tray of knives, forks, etc., on the radio.

MRS. RUDDLE (*shrilly off*): Shall I put them peas on, Mr. Bunter?

BUNTER (*hastily up to door*): I'll see to the peas, Mrs. Ruddle, at the proper time. His lordship is very particular about peas.

MRS. RUDDLE (*appearing in doorway, with the jack that came down the chimney and a brass toasting-fork*): H'm. Jes' like my Bert. "Ma," he always sez, "I 'ates peas 'ard." Funny 'ow often they is 'ard. (*Throws jack and toasting-fork at him.*) Come up lovely, 'aven't they?

BUNTER: Thank you. (*Hangs toasting-fork by fire.*)

MRS. RUDDLE: Funny the way the gentry is about them old bits o' things. Cur-ee-oes! Rubbish, if you asks me. (BUNTER looks round for spot to place jack.)

BUNTER: This is a very old piece. (*Places it by chimney.*)

MRS. RUDDLE: Reckon them as shoved it up the chimney knew wot they was doin' ! Give me a nice gas-oven, that's wot I'd like. (BUNTER *picks up* LORD PETER's coat and begins turning out its pockets. A pipe and tobacco-pouch he puts on the what-not, also a box of matches.)

BUNTER: People have been found dead in gas-ovens before now.

MRS. RUDDLE: Lor', now, Mr. Bunter, don't you talk like that. Ain't we 'ad enough corpusses about the 'ouse already ? 'Ow they can go on living here—— (BUNTER *turns out three more boxes of matches, and a pair of women's gloves.*)

BUNTER: Speaking for his lordship and myself, we are accustomed to corpses. (*He produces a sparking-plug, several more boxes of matches, and a corkscrew.*)

MRS. RUDDLE: Ah ! and w're 'e's 'appy, *she's* 'appy. (*Sighs deeply.*) It's easy to see she worships the ground 'e treads on.

BUNTER (*a little softened*): That is a very proper attitude in a young married woman. (*He adds a powder compact and two handkerchiefs, male and female, to his pile.*)

MRS. RUDDLE: 'Appy days. But it's early days yet, Mr. Bunter. A man's a man when all's said and done. Ruddie, now—'e useter knock me about something shocking w'en 'e'd 'ad a drop—though a good 'usband, and bringin' the money 'ome reg'lar. (BUNTER *pockets most of the match-boxes, and puts one on the sideboard.*)

BUNTER: I beg that you will not institute these comparisons, Mrs. Ruddie. I have served his lordship twenty years, and a sweeter-tempered gentleman you could not wish to find.

MRS. RUDDLE: You ain't married to 'im, Mr. Bunter. You can give 'im a munce warning any day (*polishing the table*).

BUNTER : I hope I know when I am well situated, Mrs. Ruddle. (*With a touch of emotion*) Twenty years' service, and never a harsh word nor an unjust action in all my knowledge of him.

MRS. RUDDLE : You're lucky. I couldn't rightly say the same of pore Mr. Noakes, which, though he's dead and gone, I will say 'e was a sour-tempered, close-fisted, suspicious old brute, pore old gentleman. (BUNTER *collects tray and begins to lay table.*)

BUNTER : " Gentleman," Mrs. Ruddle, is what I should designate as an elastic term. (CRUTCHLEY *passes the window.*)

MRS. RUDDLE : Ah, there won't be many wet eyes at 'is funeral. 'Ullo ! 'ere's love's young dream a-comin' up the path.

BUNTER (*in an awful voice*) : To whom might you be referring, Mrs. Ruddle ?

MRS. RUDDLE : Why, that Frank Crutchley.

BUNTER (*with a change of tone*) : Crutchley ! Is he your choice for your second ?

MRS. RUDDLE : Go along with you, Mr. Bunter ! Me ? No fear. No—Aggie Twitterton. (*Snorts.*) Runs after 'im like my old cat with one kitten.

BUNTER : Oh !

MRS. RUDDLE : At 'er age ! Mutton dressed as lamb. Makes me fair sick. (*Enter CRUTCHLEY, back.*)

CRUTCHLEY : 'Evenin'. Any special orders to-night ?

BUNTER : His lordship gave instructions that you were to clean the car, but it has now gone out again.

MRS. RUDDLE : 'Ave you 'eard when they've fixed for the funeral ?

CRUTCHLEY : 'Leven-thirty ter-morrer.

MRS. RUDDLE (*ghoulishly*): And 'igh time too—with 'im layin' there a week and more.

CRUTCHLEY: They didn't get much forrarder at the inquest.

MRS. RUDDLE: 'Ushin' it up, that's wot they was. Tryin' to make out there wasn't nothin' up atween Joe Sellon and 'im.

[BUNTER, *apparently occupied with selecting some wine-glasses from the whatnot cupboard and putting them on a small tray, listens to them attentively.*

CRUTCHLEY: Seemed to me they went a bit quick over that part of it.

MRS. RUDDLE: Didn't want nobody to think a bobby might a-been mixed up in it. See 'ow the coroner shut me up when I started to tell 'im? Ah! But them newspaper men was on to it quick enough.

BUNTER: Did you communicate your opinions to them, may I ask?

MRS. RUDDLE (*sniffs*): Well, I might a-done or I might not, Mr. Bunter, only jest at that instant minute out comes 'is lordship, and they was all on to 'im like wasps round a jam-pot. 'Im and 'is lady—they'll be in all the papers to-morrow. It's nice to see your friends in the pictures, ain't it, Mr. Bunter?

BUNTER: The laceration of his lordship's most intimate feelings can afford no satisfaction to *me*, Mrs. Ruddle.

MRS. RUDDLE: Maybe if I wos to tell 'em about Joe Sellon, I'd be in the pictures too. I wonder they lets that young feller go about at large. We might all be murdered in our beds.

CRUTCHLEY: You don't think he done it? Not reelly?

MRS. RUDDLE: All I knows is, they've took 'im off the job and sent 'im to a case o' swine-fever

down at Datchett's farm. And that there sergeant of Mr. Kirk's 'as bin snoopin' in and out o' Sellon's place all day.

BUNTER: Then you suspect Sellon, Mrs. Ruddle?

MRS. RUDDLE: Mr. Bunter, the moment I sees poor Mr. Noakes's body, I says to myself: "Now, wot's Joe Sellon a-doin' in this 'ere—'im bein' the last to see the poor man alive——?"

BUNTER: Then you were already aware that the crime had been committed on the Wednesday night?

MRS. RUDDLE: Well, o' course, I—— No, I didn't. See 'ere, Mr. Bunter, don't you go a-puttin' words in a woman's mouth. I——

BUNTER: I think you had better be careful.

CRUTCHLEY: That's right, ma. You go on imaginin' things, you'll land yerself in Queer Street one o' these days.

MRS. RUDDLE (*backing out*): Well, I didn't bear no particular grudge against Mr. Noakes. Not like some as I could name . . . with their forty poundses. (*Exit MRS. RUDDLE, back.*)

CRUTCHLEY: Gawdamighty, wot a tongue! I wonder 'er own spit don't poison 'er. I wouldn't hang a dog on her evidence. Mangy old poll-parrot!

[BUNTER *picks up garments he has put aside and goes out by staircase L.* CRUTCHLEY *waits for a moment, then walks over to fireplace. Enter MRS. RUDDLE with lighted lamp, which she places on table L.*

MRS. RUDDLE: Waitin' for kisses in the gloamin'?

CRUTCHLEY: Wotcher gettin' at?

MRS. RUDDLE: Aggie Twitterton's comin' down the 'ill on 'er bicycle!

CRUTCHLEY (*goes quickly to window*): Gawd! It's 'er all right.

MRS. RUDDLE: Wot it is to be the answer to the maiden's prayer!

CRUTCHLEY (*turning on her*): See 'ere, ma, there ain't never been nothin' between me and Aggie Twitterton—you know that.

MRS. RUDDLE: Not between you and 'er—but there might be between 'er and you. (*Exit MRS. RUDDLE, back. CRUTCHLEY goes to the fireplace and picks up the poker. Enter BUNTER L.*)

BUNTER: May I ask why you are loitering about here?

CRUTCHLEY: See here, Mr. Bunter. Let me bide in here for a bit. Aggie Twitterton's on the prowl—and if she was to catch sight of me—you get me?—she's a bit—— (*Touching his forehead.*)

BUNTER (*drawing the curtains, but leaving the window open*): Well, you can't stop here long. His lordship and her ladyship may be back any minute now.

[*Enter MRS. RUDDLE. She has something wrapped in a corner of her apron, and is rubbing vigorously at it as she speaks.*

MRS. RUDDLE: I've put the plates like you said, Mr. Bunter, and I've found the other vegetable dish—only it's cracked.

BUNTER: Very good. You can take these glasses out and wash them. (*Puts tray on table.*) There don't seem to be any decanters.

MRS. RUDDLE: Never you mind that—I'll soon 'ave the bottles clean.

BUNTER: What bottles? What have you got there? (*sharply*).

MRS. RUDDLE: Why, one o' them dirty old bottles you brought along with you. (*Holds it up triumphantly.*) Sech a state they're in. All over whitewash.

BUNTER: My God !

MRS. RUDDLE: You couldn't put a thing like that on the table.

BUNTER: Woman ! (*He snatches it from her.*) That's the Cockburn '96 !

MRS. RUDDLE: Ow, is it ? I thought it was something to drink.

BUNTER (*controlling himself with difficulty*): You have not, I trust, handled any of the other bottles ?

MRS. RUDDLE: Only to unpack 'em and set 'em right side up. Them cases'll come in 'andy for kindlin'.

BUNTER (*the mask comes off him all in one piece, exposing the fundamental cockney*): Gawdstrewth ! Would you believe it ? All his lordship's vintage port ! You lousy old nosy-parkering bitch ! You ignorant, interfering old bizzom ! Who told you to go poking your long nose into my pantry ?

MRS. RUDDLE: Reelly, Mr. Bunter !

[*Knock at outer door.*]

BUNTER: 'Op it out of 'ere before I take the skin off you !

MRS. RUDDLE: Well, I'm sure ! 'Ow was I to know ?

BUNTER: Get out !

MRS. RUDDLE (*retiring with dignity*): Sech manners !

CRUTCHLEY (*with enjoyment*): Put yer flat foot right into it that time, ma !

MRS. RUDDLE (*turning in the doorway*): People can do their own dirty work after this. (*She flounces out.*)

BUNTER (*cradling the bottle in his arm*): All the port—all the port ! Two and a half dozen, all shook up to blazes ! And his lordship bringing

it down in the back of the car, driving as tender and careful as if it was a baby in arms ! (*He is affected almost to tears.*)

CRUTCHLEY: Well, that's a miracle—judgin' by the way he went through Pagford this morning. I wish Belisha could a-seen him !

BUNTER (*tragically*): Not a drop fit to drink for a fortnight ! And him looking forward to his glass after dinner.

CRUTCHLEY: Well, 'e's unlucky.

[MRS. RUDDLE *throws the door open violently, letting in Miss TWITTERTON, who receives BUNTER's eloquence full in the face.*

BUNTER: There's a curse upon this house !

MRS. RUDDLE: 'Ere's Miss Twitterton ! (*She goes out, banging the door.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh ! I beg your pardon. (*Bunter pulls himself together.*) Er . . . is Lady Peter at home ? . . . I've just brought her a . . . Oh, I suppose they are out. . . . Mrs. Ruddle is so stupid. . . . Perhaps . . . (*she looks appealingly at BUNTER, and her words and manner place her at once and hopelessly on the wrong side of the social gulf*) . . . if it isn't troubling you too much, Mr. Bunter, would you be so kind as to tell Lady Peter that I have brought her a few eggs from my own hens ?

BUNTER: Certainly, Miss Twitterton. (*The form of address confirms her in the place where she has put herself.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: The Buff Orpingtons—they lay such pretty brown eggs, don't they ? And I thought, perhaps . . .

BUNTER (*taking the basket*): Her ladyship will appreciate the attention very much. Would you care to wait ?

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, thank you . . . I hardly know . . .

BUNTER: I am expecting them back very shortly. From the vicarage. (CRUTCHLEY begins to edge towards the door.)

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh . . . (she sits down rather helplessly on the chair BUNTER offers) . . . I meant just to hand the basket to Mrs. Ruddle, but she seems to be very much put about. Oh, Frank! Don't go.

BUNTER: I have been very much put about, Miss Twitterton. Mrs. Ruddle has violently agitated all his lordship's vintage port, just as it was settling down nicely after the journey.

MISS TWITTERTON (sympathetic and uncomprehending): Oh, how dreadful! Is it all spoilt? I believe they have some very good port wine at the Pig and Whistle, only it's rather expensive—four and six a bottle.

BUNTER: I fear that would scarcely meet the case.

CRUTCHLEY (jerking his thumb at the bottle BUNTER is holding): What does that stand his nibs in for?

BUNTER (who has borne as much as he can bear): Two hundred and four shillings the dozen.

CRUTCHLEY: Cripes!

MISS TWITTERTON: The dozen what?

BUNTER: Bottles. (He goes out, shattered.)

MISS TWITTERTON (reckoning on her fingers): Two hundred and four—seventeen shillings a bottle! Oh, it's impossible! . . . it's wicked!

CRUTCHLEY: Yes. A chap like that could give away forty quid out of his pocket and never miss it. But does he? No. (He spits eloquently into the fireplace.)

MISS TWITTERTON: You mustn't be so bitter about it. You couldn't expect Lord Peter—

CRUTCHLEY: "Lord Peter"—who're you to be

calling him by his pet name? Think you're somebody, don't you?

MISS TWITTERTON: That is the correct way to speak of him. I know quite well how to address people of rank.

CRUTCHLEY: Yes! And you say Mister to his blasted valet. Come off of it, my girl. It's "me lord" for you, same as the rest of us. . . . I know your mother was a schoolteacher. And your father was old Ted Baker's cowman. If your mother married beneath her, it's nothing to be stuck up about.

MISS TWITTERTON: Frank! I'm sure *you're* the last person that ought to say such a thing to me.

CRUTCHLEY (*deliberately working up a quarrel*): 'Tryin' to make out you been lowerin' yourself by associatin' with *me*, eh? All right, you go and hob-nob with the gentry. Lord Peter!

MISS TWITTERTON: I believe you're jealous, *you silly old thing* (*with fatal archness*).

CRUTCHLEY: Jealous! That's good! That's rich, that is! (*Laughs*.) What's the idea? Startin' to make eyes at his lordship now?

MISS TWITTERTON: Frank! He's a married man. How can you say such things?

CRUTCHLEY: Oh, he's married all right. Tied up good and proper. 'Ead well in the noose. "Yes, darling," "No, darling," "Cuddle me quick, darling!" Pretty, ain't it?

MISS TWITTERTON (*sentimentally*): I'm sure it's beautiful to see two people so devoted to one another.

CRUTCHLEY: Quite a ro-mance in 'igh life. Like to be in 'er shoes, wouldn't you?

MISS TWITTERTON: If only *we* could get married at once——

CRUTCHLEY: Yes. Your Uncle Noakes has put a bit of a spoke in that wheel, ain't 'e?

MISS TWITTERTON: I've been trying all day to see you and talk over what we were to do.

CRUTCHLEY: What *we're* going to do?

MISS TWITTERTON: It isn't for myself, Frank. I'd work my fingers to the bone for you.

CRUTCHLEY: Yes—and a fat lot o' good that 'ud do. 'Ow about my garridge? If it hadn't been for your soft soap I'd have got my forty quid out of the old devil months ago.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, please don't be so angry with me. We couldn't either of us know. And oh! there's another terrible thing—

CRUTCHLEY: What's up now?

MISS TWITTERTON: I'd been saving up a little bit—just a little here and there, you know—and I'd got close on fifty pounds put away in the savings bank—

CRUTCHLEY (*interested*): Fifty pound, eh? Well, that's a tidy little bit. . . .

MISS TWITTERTON: I meant it for the garage—it was to be a surprise for you—

CRUTCHLEY: Well, and what's gone wrong with it? Post office gone bust?

MISS TWITTERTON: I—I lent it to Uncle—

CRUTCHLEY: Well, you got a receipt for it, I suppose? (*Excitedly*) That's *your* money. They can't get at that. You get it out of 'em—you've a right to it. You give me the receipt and I'll settle with that MacBride. That'll cover my forty pounds—

MISS TWITTERTON: But I never thought to ask Uncle for a *receipt*. I mean, between relations—

CRUTCHLEY: You never thought—? Nothing on paper? Of all the blasted fools!

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, Frank! I *am* so sorry. Just everything seems to have gone wrong! But you know you never dreamt, any more than I did——

CRUTCHLEY: No, or I'd 'ave acted a bit different, I tell you!

MISS TWITTERTON: Perhaps Lord Peter would *lend* you the money to start the garage. He's ever so rich.

CRUTCHLEY: Well, that's a fact—he might.

MISS TWITTERTON: We could get married at once and have that little corner cottage—you know, on the main road, where you said—and there'd be ever so many cars stopping there. And I could help quite a lot with my Buff Orpingtons——

CRUTCHLEY: You and your Buff Orpingtons!

MISS TWITTERTON: And I could give piano lessons again. There's the stationmaster's little Elsie——

CRUTCHLEY: Little Elsie's bottom! Now, see here, Aggie, it's time we got down to brass tacks. You and me getting spliced with the idea of coming into your Uncle's money—that was one thing, see? That's business. But if there ain't no money, it's off. You get that?

MISS TWITTERTON: But, Frank——

CRUTCHLEY: A man that's starting in life wants a wife, see? A nice little bit to come 'ome to—something he can cuddle—not a skinny old hen with a brood of Buff Orpingtons——

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh! how can you speak like that? How——?

CRUTCHLEY: Look at yourself in the glass, you old fool!

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh! you can't——

CRUTCHLEY: Coming the schoolmarm over me—with your “Mind yer manners, Frank,” and

"Mind yer aitches"—"Frank's so clever"—making me look a blasted fool.

MISS TWITTERTON: I only wanted to help you get on——

CRUTCHLEY: Yes—showing me off like as if I was your belongings. Like to take me up to bed like the silver teapot—and a silver teapot 'ud be about as much use to you, I reckon.

MISS TWITTERTON (*putting her hands over her ears*): I won't listen to you—you're mad—you're——

CRUTCHLEY: Thought you'd bought me with your uncle's money. Well, where is it?

MISS TWITTERTON: How can you be so cruel—after all I've done for you?

CRUTCHLEY: Made me a laughing-stock—and got me into a blasted mess. I suppose you've been blabbing about all over the place that we was only waiting to have the banns put up——

MISS TWITTERTON: I've never said a word.

CRUTCHLEY: Oh, haven't you? Well, you should hear Ma Ruddle——

MISS TWITTERTON (*with a last burst of spirit*): And if I had, why shouldn't I? You've told me over and over you were fond of me—you said you were—you said you were——

CRUTCHLEY: Oh, can that row!

MISS TWITTERTON: But you did say so. Oh! you can't be so cruel—you don't know—you don't know—Frank, please, please—I know it's been a dreadful disappointment—but you can't mean this—you can't! I—I—oh, do be kind to me, Frank. I love you so! (*Grasps frantically at him.*)

[*The hum of a powerful car is heard at the gate, then switched off. He flings her heavily on to the floor.*]

CRUTCHLEY: Damn you, get off—take your blasted claws out of my neck. Shut up! I'm sick and tired of the sight of you.

[*At the same time steps come up the path and two voices are heard singing.*]

PETER (*singing, off*):

She sings of luckless ladies
For lack of love who die,
She sings of luckless ladies
For lack of love who die——

[*These words can be heard as they pass the open window.*]

CRUTCHLEY: Hell's bells! They're comin' in!
Get up!

HARRIET (*singing, off*):

For me my turtle sings not,
A lovely lad have I——

CRUTCHLEY (*hunting for his cap and putting it on with a jerk*): You'd better clear out, sharp. I'm off. Get up, I say! (*He goes to the door.*)

[*PETER and HARRIET are heard outside, singing together:*

In my { lady's } bosom
lover's }
Sweet it is to lie, to lie.
In my { lady's } bosom
lover's }
Sweet it is to lie.

[*Exit CRUTCHLEY. The outer door opens and shuts again. Voices. Miss TWITTERTON lifts a woebegone face.*]

PETER (*off*): Oh, Crutchley! You can put the car away.

[*MISS TWITTERTON, dabbing at her face with her handkerchief, looks wildly round for a way out, but the voices are just outside the door.*]

CRUTCHLEY (*off*): Very good, my lord. Anything further to-night?

PETER (*off*): No. That's all. Good night.

[*His hand is on the door. Miss TWITTERTON makes a despairing bolt up staircase L.*]

HARRIET: Good night, Crutchley.

CRUTCHLEY: Good night, my lord. Good night, my lady.

[*Enter HARRIET and PETER, back. She wears a cloak over semi-evening dress. He is in dinner-jacket with scarf.*]

PETER: Well, well, well. Here we are again. (*Removes scarf and helps her off with her cloak, kissing her neck.*)

HARRIET: Having done our duty by the vicarage.

PETER: Yes. Wonderfully inspiring thing, doing one's duty. Gives one a sort of exalted sensation. I feel quite light-headed.

HARRIET (*sits R.*): I'm feeling slightly intoxicated, too. It couldn't possibly be the vicar's sherry.

PETER (*firmly*): Not possibly. No—it's just the consciousness of duty done—or the country air—or something. . . . It affects you that way, too?

HARRIET: Yes. Rather giddy-making. But nice.

PETER: Oh, definitely. I mean to say . . . yes, absolutely definitely. Like champagne. Almost like being in love. But I don't think it could be that, do you?

HARRIET: Oh, surely not.

PETER: Because, after all, we're married. I mean, you can't be married *and* in love. Not with the same person. I mean, it isn't done.

HARRIET: Absolutely impossible.

PETER: Pity. Because I'm feeling rather youthful and foolish to-night. Tender and twining, like a very young pea. Positively romantic.

HARRIET: Romantic, darling?

PETER: Definitely. I want the violins to strike up in the orchestra and discourse soft music while the limelight merchant turns up the moon. . . . Well, and why not soft music? Let's see what the B.B.C. can do for us. (*Opens and switches on radio.*) Now, my little minstrels of Portland Place! Strike, you myrtle-crowned boys; ivied maidens, strike together!

VOICE: . . . and the beds should be carefully made up beforehand with good, well-rotted horse-manure. . . .

HARRIET: Help!

PETER (*switching off*): That's quite enough of that.

HARRIET: The man has a dirty mind.

PETER: Disgusting. I shall write a stiff letter to Sir John Reith. . . . Isn't it an extraordinary thing that just when a fellow's bubbling over with the purest and most sacred emotions, when he's feeling like Sir Galahad and Julius Cæsar and Clark Gable all rolled into one, when he, so to speak, bestrides the clouds and sits upon the bosom of the air—

HARRIET: Darling! Are you sure it's not the sherry?

PETER: Sherry! . . . Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear—Hullo! they've put the moon on the wrong side.

HARRIET: Very careless of the limelight merchant.

PETER: Drunk again, drunk again. (*Goes to lamp on whatnot.*)

HARRIET: I told you it was the sherry.

PETER: Curse this moon—it leaks. (*Wrapping handkerchief round base of lamp*) O more than moon, Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere. (*Setting lamp on sideboard near HARRIET's chair R.*) That's better. Now then:

Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear,
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree
tops——

Observe the fruit-trees (*indicates aspidistras*) specially imported by the management at colossal expense. On my right, the Apple of Eden. On my left, the Apple of the Hesperides——

HARRIET: And behind you the Apple of Discord.

PETER (*looking at cactus*): It's prickly enough.
(*Pulls her to her feet and dances with her, singing*):

Here we go round the prickly pear,
prickly pear, prickly pear,
Here we go round the prickly pear,
On honeymoon days in the evening.

HARRIET (*dropping into chair R.*): Peter, you are a lunatic.

PETER (*kneels*): Oh, darling! I must talk nonsense. If I tried to be serious I should make such a bloody fool of myself. Think of it. Laugh at it. A well-fed, well-groomed, well-off Englishman of forty-odd, in a boiled shirt and a dashed silly eyeglass, going down on his knees like a damned actor—and saying to his wife—to his own wife, that's the funny part of it—saying to her—saying——

HARRIET: Tell me.

PETER: I can't—I daren't——

HARRIET: It's terrifying to be so happy.

PETER: No—don't say that.

All other things to their destruction draw,
Only our love hath no decay;
This no to-morrow hath, nor yesterday;
Running, it never runs from us away,
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting
day.

HARRIET: Peter——

PETER: How can I find words? Poets have taken them all and left me with nothing to say or do.

HARRIET: Except to teach me for the first time what they meant.

PETER: Have I done that?

HARRIET: Oh, Peter! All my life I have been wandering and groping in the dark, but now I have found your heart and am satisfied.

PETER: And what do all the great words come to in the end but that? "I love you—I am at rest with you—I have come home."

[He lays his head on her knee. Enter MISS TWITTERTON very quietly from door L. Seeing them still there and absorbed, she shrinks back.]

HARRIET: Dear. My heart's heart. My own dear lover and husband. You are mine, you are mine—all mine.

PETER: Yours. Such as I am, yours. With all my faults, all my follies, yours utterly and for ever. While this poor, passionate, mountebank body has hands to hold you and lips to say "I love you"—

MISS TWITTERTON (*sobs*): Oh! I can't bear it! I can't bear it!

PETER: Damn and blast! (*Jumps to his feet.*)

HARRIET: Who is it? (*Gets up quickly.*) What are you doing there? (*Half crosses to her.*) Miss Twitterton?

PETER: I knew I should make a bloody fool of myself. (*Strides up-stage to fire.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, forgive me. I didn't know—I never meant— (*Breaking down.*) Oh, I am so dreadfully unhappy!

PETER: I think I had better see about decanting the port. (*Exit PETER hurriedly, back, leaving the door open.*)

MISS TWITTERTON (*startled out of her own sorrows by that ominous word*): The port? Oh, dear! Now he'll be angry again.

HARRIET: What *has* happened?

PETER (*off*): Bunter! I'm going to have a shot at decanting the port. . . .

MISS TWITTERTON (*speaking through PETER's lines*): Mrs. Ruddle has done something frightful to the port-wine.

HARRIET: Oh, my poor Peter!

BUNTER (*off*): I regret, my lord, that there has been an unfortunate accident. . . .

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, dear! (*They listen, but only an explanatory mumble is audible, no words.*)

HARRIET: Heavens. What *can* the woman have done?

[*More mumbling off.*]

MISS TWITTERTON: I *believe* she's shaken the bottle. (*Pause.*)

PETER (*off, with a loud yelp of anguish*): What! All my pretty chickens and their dam——

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, I *hope* he won't be violent.

HARRIET: Violent? Oh, I shouldn't think so.

[*But MISS TWITTERTON's alarm is infectious, and the two women cling together, listening for the outbreak of violence.*]

PETER (*off*): Well, all I can say is, Bunter, don't let it happen again. . . . All right. . . . We'd better go and view the bodies.

[*His voice dies away. The women breathe more freely. The dreadful menace of male violence has lifted its shadow from the house.*]

HARRIET: Well, that wasn't so bad after all. . . . My dear Miss Twitterton, what is the matter? . . . You're trembling all over. . . . Surely,

surely you didn't *really* think Peter was going to—to—throw things about or anything, did you? Come and sit down by the fire. Your hands are like ice.

[Leads her up-stage, and plants her on settle L., where she fidgets nervously.]

MISS TWITTERTON: It was silly of me. But . . . I'm always so terrified of . . . gentlemen being angry and . . . and . . . after all, they're men, aren't they—and men are so horrible! (*The end of the sentence comes out in a shuddering burst.*)

HARRIET: Dear Miss Twitterton—what is the trouble! Can I help? Has somebody been horrible to you? (*Bends over her and takes her hands. This is too much for MISS TWITTERTON.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, my lady, my lady—I'm ashamed to tell you—he said such dreadful things to me. (*Then, through her tears*) Oh, please forgive me.

HARRIET: Who did? (*Sits opposite her on settle R.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Frank. Horrible things. . . . And I know I'm a little older than he is—and I suppose I've been very foolish—but he *did* say he was fond of me—

HARRIET: Frank Crutchley?

MISS TWITTERTON: Yes—and it wasn't my fault about Uncle's money—and we were going to be married—only for the forty pounds and my own little savings that Uncle borrowed—and they're all gone now, and no money to come from Uncle—and now he says he hates the sight of me and I *do* love him so!

HARRIET: I *am* so sorry.

MISS TWITTERTON: He called me an old hen. He was so *angry* about my savings, but I never *thought* of asking Uncle for a receipt.

HARRIET: Oh, my dear !

MISS TWITTERTON: I was so happy—thinking we were going to be married as soon as he could get the garage started—only we didn't tell anybody, because, you see, I was a little bit older than him.

PETER (*singing, off*):

What would you give, my lady,
To have your lover nigh ?

MISS TWITTERTON: And he's so handsome. We used to meet in the churchyard—there's a nice seat there. I let him kiss me.

PETER (*singing off*):

What would you give, my lady,
To have your lover nigh ?

MISS TWITTERTON: And now he hates me—I don't know what to do—I shall go and drown myself. Nobody *knows* what I've done for Frank !

PETER (*singing off*):

I'd burn the Tower of London
And let the Thames run dry:
In my lady's bosom
Sweet it is to lie.

HARRIET (*in an exasperated undertone*): Oh, Peter !
(*She gets up and shuts the door upon this heartless exhibition. MISS TWITTERTON is crying quietly to herself. HARRIET comes back and stands beside her.*)
Listen, my dear. Don't cry so terribly. He isn't worth it. Honestly, he can't be. There isn't a man in ten million that's worth breaking your heart over. (*Pause.*) Try to forget about him.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, and what you must have thought of me—and I hope he isn't too terribly angry—you see, I heard you coming in, just outside the door, and I just couldn't face you,

and I ran upstairs, and then I didn't hear anybody, so I thought you'd gone, and then—seeing you so happy together——

HARRIET: It doesn't matter the very least bit. *Please* don't think any more about it. Peter knows it was quite an accident. Now, don't cry any more.

MISS TWITTERTON: I must be going. I'm afraid I look a sight.

HARRIET: No, not a bit. Just a touch of powder, that's all you want. Poor Bunter and the port—it must have been a blow to him. (*She is rapidly tidying Miss TWITTERTON up.*) There—you look quite all right—nobody would notice anything.

MISS TWITTERTON (*gazing at herself in the mirror, with childish interest*): I've never had powder on my face before. It makes me feel—quite fast !

HARRIET: It's helpful sometimes.

MISS TWITTERTON: I hope nobody will think——

HARRIET: Nobody will notice a thing. Now, promise me you won't make yourself miserable—about anything.

MISS TWITTERTON: No—I'll try not to. I—— (*She starts to cry again, but, remembering the powder, dries her eyes quickly, with a glance at the mirror.*) You have been so kind. Now I must run. Oh, dear ! I hope I haven't kept you from your supper.

[BUNTER enters with tray.

HARRIET: It's not till eight. Now, good night, and don't worry. Bunter, please show Miss Twitterton out.

[*Exeunt* MISS TWITTERTON and BUNTER.

Poor little soul.

[*Enter* PETER, with the suspicious promptness of someone who has been lurking in the pantry to hear the front door shut.

PETER: Is the coast clear? (*He sets the decanter down to warm.*)

HARRIET: Yes; she's gone. (*She stands beside him, warming her hands.*)

PETER: My God, Harriet, what was I saying?

HARRIET: It's all right, darling. You were only quoting Donne.

PETER: Is that all? I rather fancied I had put in one or two little bits of my own. Oh, well! What's it matter? I love you (*enter BUNTER with standard lamp*), and I don't care who knows it!

HARRIET: Bless you!

PETER: All the same, this house is making me feel jumpy. Skeletons in the chimney, corpses in the cellar, and elderly females hiding behind doors—I shall look under the bed to-night. (*He feels the decanter.*)

HARRIET: Is that the port after all?

[*BUNTER puts the lamp just behind the left-hand settle, so that it illuminates the area round the fire.*]

PETER: No, it's the claret. (*BUNTER casts him a look of mute anguish and retires.*) And it's not only me. Bunter's nerves are very much affected. And now he thinks I'm not giving my mind to this infuriating case.

HARRIET: But what can you do? There don't seem to be any clues.

PETER: No—and, if there ever were any, Bunter probably cleared them away with his own hands—helped by Ruddle. Remorse is eating into his soul like a caterpillar in a cabbage. . . . And all *I've* done so far is to throw suspicion on that wretched young Sellon.

HARRIET: Do you think he did it?

PETER (*frowns*): You know, Harriet, this is one of those exasperatingly simple cases. I mean, it's

not like those ones where the great financier is stabbed in the library——

HARRIET: I know! And thousands of people stampede in and out of the French window all night, armed with motives and sharp instruments——

PETER: And the corpse turns out to be his own twin brother returned from the Fiji Islands and disguised as himself. That sort of thing is comparatively easy. But here's a dead man in a locked house and a perfectly plain suspect, with means, motive, and opportunity, and all the evidence pat—with the trifling exception of the proof.

HARRIET: Sellon doesn't look like a murderer.

PETER: No; and, but for that miserable business of the note-case, I'd have sworn he was honest. Damn it! he confided in me—he appealed to me—and then he had to tell me a dashed idiotic lie. (BUNTER enters and hovers.) He must have come into the house—— Yes, Bunter?

BUNTER: The menu, my lord.

[HARRIET sits on left-hand settle.

PETER: Oh, right! (Taking the menu from BUNTER) M'm. Caviare? I don't like this West End touch, Bunter. It's out of keeping with all this.

HARRIET: I adore caviare.

PETER: Darling, you shall have it. Roast duck and green peas——

BUNTER: Local produce, my lord.

PETER: That's better. Bunter roasts a verry pretty duck. Mushrooms on toast——

BUNTER: From the field behind the cottage, my lord.

PETER: From the——? Good God, Bunter, I hope they *are* mushrooms, and not anything poisonous.

BUNTER: Nothing poisonous, my lord. I have consumed a number of them myself, to make sure.

HARRIET: I call that simply heroic.

PETER: Devoted Valet Risks Life for Master. Very well, Bunter. Oh, and, by the way, was it you playing hide-and-seek with Miss Twitterton on our stairs?

BUNTER: My lord!

HARRIET: It's all right, Bunter.

BUNTER (*taking the hint*): Very good, my lady. (*Exit BUNTER.*)

HARRIET: She was hiding from us, because she was very much upset. Crutchley's been behaving like a perfect beast to her.

PETER (*inattentively, giving the decanter a half-turn*): Has he, by Jove?

HARRIET (*indignantly*): He's been making love to the poor little soul.

[PETER lets out a derisive hoot, which proves him to be, after all, not exempt from the failings common to his sex.]

HARRIET: Peter, it isn't funny.

PETER: I beg your pardon, my dear. You're quite right. It's not. (*He straightens himself up and speaks with sudden emphasis.*) It's anything but funny. Is she fond of the blighter?

HARRIET: My dear, pathetically. And they were going to be married and start the new garage—with the forty pounds and her little savings—only now he finds she won't come into any money from her uncle. . . . Peter! What are you looking at me like that for?

PETER: Harriet, I don't like this at all. (*He is standing at the right-hand corner of the fireplace, staring at her.*)

HARRIET: Of course, he's chucked her over now, the brute——

PETER: Yes, yes—but don't you see what you're telling me? (*As she stares at him she does begin to see the implications.*) She'd have given him the money, of course? Done anything in the world for him?

HARRIET: She said nobody knew what she *had* done for him. Oh, Peter! You can't mean *that*! It *couldn't* be the little Twitterton!

PETER: Why not?

HARRIET: It's a motive—I see it's a motive—a big motive. (*She comes close up to him.*) But you didn't want to hear about motive.

PETER: But you're cracking my ear-drums with it.

HARRIET (*meeting his challenge*): All right. But HOW could she have done it?

PETER: Hers is the easiest HOW of all. She had the key to the house, and no alibi after 7.30. Killing hens is no alibi for killing a man.

HARRIET: But to smash in a man's head with a blow like that—she's tiny, and he was a big man.

PETER: *She* could have taken him unaware. I can't see him sitting down and letting Crutchley or Sellon go pussy-footing about behind him. But a woman one knows and trusts. Look—I'm sitting down writing (*sits down at dinner-table*)—you take the poker—(*she does it*)—two quick steps now—you needn't hit hard—and you're an exceedingly wealthy widow.

HARRIET (*hastily putting down the poker*): Yes—and I've only to walk out and lock the door with my own key—I suppose you've seen that all along.

PETER (*grimly*): Yes—Twitterton's HOW has been clear all along—and now we've strengthened the WHY. It's a whacking great motive,

HARRIET: a middle-aged woman's last bid for love—and the money to make the bid.

HARRIET: Could she have let in Crutchley? It's *his* motive too.

PETER: Crutchley's alibi after 6.30 simply can't be shaken. Allowing that he might have done the thing earlier—— How could he make Noakes move and talk three hours after he was dead? It's not any clever stuff with a voice on a gramophone record. Noakes was *seen* by Mrs. Ruddle and Sellon.

HARRIET: Sellon. His motive was as good as any other. If he isn't guilty, why did he tell you a lie?

PETER: Why? Why? I don't know why. *How* did he get in? After all that row at the window—— (*Gets up, and goes up to window.*)

HARRIET: I can think how it *might* have been done.

PETER: Oh, so can I. A thousand fantastical schemes. (*Crosses R.*) But how *was* it done? We want proof. We want facts. How? How? How? This house would tell me, if roofs and walls could speak. All men are liars. Send me a dumb witness who cannot lie!

HARRIET: The house? But we've silenced the house ourselves. If we'd asked it on Tuesday night—but all the evidence is destroyed—we're helpless——

PETER: That's what's biting me. (*Leans over back of armchair.*) Kirk's got to make a case against somebody, and he can only plump for the most probable. When I tell him about Twitterton and Crutchley——

HARRIET (*jumps up and crosses to him*): No, no, you can't go and tell Kirk. It's cruel. It's horrible. That poor little woman—she *couldn't*, Peter!

PETER: All the evidence shows that if it isn't Twitterton, it's Sellon; if it isn't Sellon, it's Twitterton—or Twitterton and Crutchley together. It lies among the three of them. (*He speaks this straight at her; then swings round abruptly, and walks over to the sideboard.*)

HARRIET: Peter, I know I said to you at the beginning, "Carry on" . . . but we didn't *know* these people then. The man who trusted you—the woman who trusted me—how *can* we take their trust and make it into a rope for their necks? It would be abominable!

PETER (*disturbed, and still not turning round*): Harriet, Harriet, I was afraid it would come to this.

HARRIET: It's brutal!

PETER: Murder is brutal. I saw that old man's body——

HARRIET: Oh!

PETER: God knows we are ready enough to forget the dead——

HARRIET: But, Peter, it's the living.

PETER: That's just what it is. (*He moves quickly to the cabinet.*) Until we get at the truth, every innocent man and woman is suspect. (*He emphasises his points by rapping on the cabinet.*) Whoever suffers, we *must* have the truth. Nothing else matters a damn.

HARRIET: But must it be *your* hands——?

PETER: Ah! . . . Yes. I have given you the right to ask me that. You married into trouble when you married my work and me.

HARRIET (*taken aback*): Oh! . . . I see. . . . Yes, I suppose you are bound——

PETER: Bound? We are bound together, Harriet. And the moment has come when

something will have to give way—you, or I, or the bond.

HARRIET: Oh, no!

PETER: Yes. We must face this once and for all.

HARRIET: Oh, my dear! What is happening to us? What has become of our peace?

PETER: Broken! That's what violence does. Once it starts, it catches us all—sooner or later.

HARRIET: Is there no escape?

PETER: Only by running away. . . . *(Pause.)* . . . Perhaps it might be better for us to run. If I finish this job, someone is going to hang. I have no right to drag you into this mess. . . . Oh, my dear, don't upset yourself so. *(He goes up to her.)* If you say the word, we will go right away. We'll leave the whole damnable business . . . and never meddle again.

HARRIET: Do you really mean that?

PETER: Of course I mean it. I have said so. *(His tone is that of a beaten man. He crosses and sits on arm of chair by table L.)*

HARRIET: Peter, you are mad. Never dare to suggest such a thing. Whatever marriage is, it isn't that.

PETER: Isn't what, Harriet?

HARRIET: Letting your affection corrupt your judgment. What kind of life could we have if I knew that you had become less than yourself by marrying me?

PETER: My dear girl, most women would consider it a triumph.

HARRIET: I know. *(Gets up and comes down-stage.)* I've heard them. "My husband would do anything for me." . . . It's degrading. No human being ought to have such power over another.

PETER: It's a very real power, Harriet.

HARRIET *(decidedly)*: Then we won't use it. If

we disagree, we'll fight it out like gentlemen. But we won't stand for matrimonial blackmail.

PETER: Harriet, you have no sense of dramatic values. Do you mean to say that we are to play out our domestic comedy without the locked door and the great bedroom scene?

HARRIET: Certainly. We will have nothing so vulgar.

PETER: Well, thank God for that!

HARRIET (*goes over to him*): You *must* follow your conscience, whatever I may think. And it shan't make any difference.

PETER: Thank you, Harriet. That is love with honour.

HARRIET: As a matter of fact, you were right and I was wrong. Your job is to set your face against violence. To see that no innocent person suffers. Whatever happens, that is a thing worth doing.

PETER (*suddenly discouraged, getting up, and crossing R.*): Always provided one can do it.

[*Enter BUNTER, with dishes.*]

BUNTER: Dinner is served, my lady.

[*HARRIET crosses at once to table, and sits.*]

PETER: Ah! Perhaps caviare and roast duck will brighten my wits. (*Collects the decanter, and crosses to table and sits.*) If the worst comes to the worst, there is always dinner.

BUNTER (*standing between them at the table*): There is a man at the door with a lorry, my lord. He has come to remove the furniture. It appears there is a bill of sale upon the contents of the house.

PETER: But the owner's dead.

BUNTER: I understand that the bill fell due before the decease of Mr. Noakes, and that the

furniture would have been removed last week, but for the forbearance of the creditors.

PETER (*rises*): I'll go and settle with the fellow.

HARRIET: No, Peter. Let it go. It has Noakes's horrible personality stamped all over it. I hate it.

PETER: You're quite right. Bunter, tell them to carry on.

BUNTER (*with a glance at the dinner-table*): Immediately, my lord?

PETER: Yes. No. First thing in the morning. (*Sits.*)

BUNTER: Very good, my lord (*going*).

PETER: Wait a moment, though. We can't let every clue go out of the house. How about the police?

BUNTER: Superintendent Kirk is waiting to see your lordship. He has been talking to the lorry-man.

PETER: Show him in. (*Exit BUNTER.*)

HARRIET: Yes. Let *him* decide.

[*Enter BUNTER, showing in KIRK.*]

BUNTER: Superintendent Kirk.

PETER: Well, Superintendent, what are we going to do about this?

KIRK: My lord, we've been over the house this afternoon from top to bottom. If the stuff was to stay here till Doomsday, it wouldn't get us any forrarder.

PETER: Very well, Bunter. Make it right with the man.

[*Exit BUNTER.*]

KIRK: By the way, Crutchley's out of it. We've checked his alibi. Motive: it all comes down to that. Who stood to gain? And the answer is, Joe Sellon. Not Crutchley—he loses all round.

And it's not as though Miss Twitterton was in any hurry to lay her hands on the cash——(going).

HARRIET: Mr. Kirk! (KIRK turns back. PETER, with his hand on the butter-knife, is arrested in mid-motion.) There's something I ought to tell you . . . about Miss Twitterton . . .

[KIRK walks up to the table as

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

The same: about noon on Friday. The removal of the furniture is proceeding. The table has gone, the what-not has gone, and so has the armchair. The curtains have been rolled into a bale. The aspidistras have been gathered into a forlorn group. The fire-irons have been tied together with string. The rugs are still on the floor, and the two settles and the sideboard are still in their places. So is the drain-pipe. So is the radio cabinet, with the cactus above it; and the clock is still there, though BILL, mounted on the step-ladder, is taking down the pictures and mirrors and obviously intends to take the clock in the near future. Straw lies about a packing-case, in which GEORGE is laying away the statuettes, the wax fruit and other ornaments. HARRIET is directing operations and CRUTCHLEY lending a hand. As the curtain rises CRUTCHLEY goes off R. carrying some plants and the lamp-shade from the standard-lamp which stands where it did in the last scene.

HARRIET: You might leave a few chairs here. My husband will be bringing some friends in for a few minutes after the funeral. (Cars heard outside.) In fact, here they are.

GEORGE (*putting the last horror into the packing-case*

and laying the lid lightly across it): Right you are, lady. Can we get in upstairs?

HARRIET: Yes, certainly. We shan't be wanting this room very long.

GEORGE: O.K., lady. Come along, Bill, this way.

BILL: Right-oh, George. (*He comes down from the step-ladder.*) It'll take us a bit o' time to take down them four-posters.

[*Exeunt GEORGE and BILL upstairs. CRUTCHLEY takes the steps and goes to remove the cactus. A number of people dressed in black pass the windows.*]

HARRIET: Leave these things for the present, Crutchley.

CRUTCHLEY: Very good, my lady.

[*CRUTCHLEY folds the steps against the wall by the sideboard and exits, back.*]

HARRIET *takes off the apron and head-kerchief that she has been wearing and puts her hair into order.*

At door, back, enter, as from a funeral: Miss TWITTERTON, in a little black frock, an old-fashioned black coat, a youthful hat with a little black feather, and black kid gloves, carrying a black-edged handkerchief; the REV. SIMON GOODACRE, with his well-worn black overcoat over his cassock, carrying his surplice, stole and Oxford hood over his arm, and taking off his mortar-board as he enters; BUNTER in a correct suit of abysmally sable black, having in one hand a quantity of prayer-books, and in the other a severe bowler; MRS. RUDDLE, in a black-beaded mantle and a bonnet with quivering jet ornaments on wires; PUFFETT, in an astonishing greenish-black cut-away coat of incredible age, buttoned perilously across his sweaters over his working trousers, and wearing a bowler of the pattern affected by young bloods in the 'nineties, which he takes off a few moments after his entrance, polishing his brow with a white-spotted red cotton handkerchief.

HARRIET: Well ! Here you all are ! Come and sit down while you can ! *(She finds a chair for MISS TWITTERTON, and bends over to say something to her which makes MISS TWITTERTON squeeze her hand in real gratitude. She seats THE VICAR on the left-hand settle.)* Do sit down, Mr. Goodacre. *(And he murmurs "Thank you; thank you.")* HARRIET, to the company in general) Were there many people at the funeral ?

GOODACRE: A very large attendance. Really a remarkable attendance.

MISS TWITTERTON: Yes; indeed, it was wonderful. And such a mass of flowers ! Sixteen wreaths—including your beautiful tribute, dear Lady Peter !

[She is much more cheerful than on the preceding day. The excitement of being chief mourner at such a funeral has restored her to self-importance.]

HARRIET: Just fancy ! *(Obviously knowing nothing about the tribute.)*

MISS TWITTERTON: And fully choral ! Such touching hymns ! Dear Mr. Goodacre . . . *(She turns with gratified murmurings to GOODACRE.)*

PUFFETT: And the reverend's words, if I may say so, sir, went straight to the 'eart.

MISS TWITTERTON: Such gratifying tokens of respect for Uncle.

[Enter PETER in a faultless black suit, black tie, black scarf, rigidly tailored black overcoat, and resplendent topper, which, however, being set at a slightly irresponsible angle, rather mars the solemnity of the effect. He is carrying a tightly furled silk umbrella. He takes the centre of the admiring circle and surveys his domain.]

MRS. RUDDLE: I never seen nothing to touch it, and I been to every buryin' in Paggleham these forty years and more. *(She sniffs into her handkerchief.)*

HARRIET (*to PETER*): *Did* we send a wreath?

PETER: God knows. (*To BUNTER*) *Did* we send a wreath?

BUNTER: Yes, my lord. Hothouse lilies and white hyacinths.

PETER: Most chaste and appropriate.

MISS TWITTERTON: The *whole* village was there—and ever so many people from Pagford and Broxford.

PETER: And half Fleet Street. (*Takes his gloves off.*) Bunter, we could do with some drinks.

BUNTER: Very good, my lord. (*Exit, back.*)

PETER: I hope they have left us a few glasses. (*Stripping off the overcoat.*)

HARRIET: I think so—but they've commandeered the beer barrel. (*PUFFETT registers disappointment.*)

PETER: That's awkward.

[BILL and GEORGE enter from staircase, carrying a hip-bath full of wash-basins, jugs, and bedroom utensils.

GEORGE: Excuse me, my lady, that there perambulator in the outhouse, is that yours?

HARRIET: Oh, dear no.

GEORGE (*to PETER*): And all them silver-mounted brushes upstairs——?

PETER (*with a reproachful look at the contents of the hip-bath*): Tush! Nothing is gained by coarseness. (*Enter BUNTER with sherry and glasses on tray. PETER drops his overcoat over the bath, adds the scarf and the topper to the pile, and hangs the umbrella over GEORGE'S arm.*) My man will come up presently and show you which things are ours.

GEORGE (*embarrassed by the coat and topper*): Right-oh, guv'nor.

[*They move across to door, back. BUNTER sets the tray on the radio cabinet, intercepts GEORGE and relieves him of the garments.*

GOODACRE: You will hardly believe it, but when I was at Oxford, I placed one of those on the Martyrs' Memorial.

PETER: Really?

[*Exeunt GEORGE and BILL, back.*

HARRIET: Mrs. Ruddle, you won't be able to get on with any of the cleaning yet, but I expect Bunter will be glad of a little help.

PETER: And, Bunter—send over to the pub for some beer. (*He pours out sherry.*)

BUNTER: The beer is provided for, my lord. (*Exit BUNTER.*)

PUFFETT (*to MRS. RUDDLE*): Don't 'urry, ma, or they'll think we're thirsty! (*Exeunt MRS. RUDDLE and PUFFETT.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: And to think that the last time we partook of Lord Peter's sherry—

GOODACRE: Ah, dear me! (*But he seems to appreciate the flavour of it none the less.*)

HARRIET (*aside to PETER*): By the way, Mr. Kirk said he would look in again in half an hour.

PETER (*in a dissatisfied tone*): I see. Well, I suppose that's that. Now, padre—about this plant you have a fancy for—the one with the pet name—

GOODACRE: Ah! yes! The cactus. Yes. Thank you. I spoke to the man about it, he made no objection to my taking it away.

PETER: For a consideration, I imagine. (*He sits down on the packing-case and lights a cigarette.*)

GOODACRE: Oh, it was a very small sum. The cactus is well worth it. Young Crutchley was very knowledgeable with cacti.

MISS TWITTERTON: Indeed! I'm *glad* to hear that Frank Crutchley fulfilled some of his obligations.

PETER (*hastily*): Well, padre, rather you than me. I can't say they've ever been my idea of a companionable sort of plant.

GOODACRE: Perhaps not. But you know this is an extremely handsome specimen. (*Gets up to go and gloat over it, but is momentarily arrested by the entrance of BUNTER and GEORGE, back. GEORGE crosses to staircase. BUNTER goes up to Miss TWITTERTON.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Uncle always took *great* pride in that cactus.

BUNTER: Excuse me, my lady. (*Crosses to Miss TWITTERTON.*) The furniture removers are about to clear the small room at the top of the stairs, and have desired me to inquire what is to be done with the various trunks and articles labelled Twitterton.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh! dear me! The box-room! Yes, of course. I think, if I may, I had better run up and see to that myself. (*Rises.*)

BUNTER: Thank you.

MISS TWITTERTON: There are quite a lot of my things in the box-room. You see, my little cottage is so very *small*—and there were some of dear *Mother's* things—and Uncle *very* kindly let me store them with him—if you won't think it very rude of me—

HARRIET: But of course, Miss Twitterton. Do go and see to them. (*Miss TWITTERTON crosses to the staircase. GOODACRE opens the door for her, and stops her on the threshold, takes her hand in his and holds it while he speaks.*)

GOODACRE: I shall be going in a moment, so I'll say good-bye.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, dear Mr. Goodacre, I don't know how to thank you——

GOODACRE: No, no, no! You know, you mustn't let yourself be too upset. In fact, I'm going to ask you to be very brave and sensible and to play for me as usual on Sunday. (MISS TWITTERTON *gasps*.) Now will you? We've all come to rely on you.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh! Yes. On Sunday. Yes, of course, dear Mr. Goodacre, if you wish it——

GOODACRE: It will gratify me very much.

MISS TWITTERTON: Oh, thank you! I—you—everybody's been so good to me—— (*She vanishes in a whirl of gratitude and confusion.*)

GOODACRE (*closing door, and then crossing to centre*): Poor little soul. Very distressing. This unsolved mystery hanging over us——

PETER: Yes. Not too good. (GOODACRE *fixes his eye on the cactus and frowns at it, paying no attention to him.*)

GOODACRE: Now this is very strange—very strange indeed. Look at this. (*Points at cactus. PETER and HARRIET both go to look. HARRIET, finding it too high to see, gets on settle and looks down on it, one hand on PETER's shoulder.*) Do you see?

PETER: In an ordinary way I should have called it a spot of mildew; but for all I know about cactuses it may be just the bloom of a healthy complexion!

GOODACRE (*grimly*): It is mildew. (*Looks accusingly from PETER to HARRIET.*) Somebody has been giving it too much water.

HARRIET (*jumping down*): None of us have touched it, Mr. Goodacre.

PETER: I don't like the brute, but I'm a humane—— (*Breaks off suddenly, frowning.*)

GOODACRE: Once the summer is over you must

administer water very sparingly, very sparingly indeed.

HARRIET: It couldn't have been the knowledgeable Crutchley.

GOODACRE: Well, *somebody*—no doubt with the best intentions—must have made a mistake.

PETER: A mistake. (*Lightly*) Oh, well, criminals always make some mistake— (*Breaks off.*)

HARRIET: I do hope it's not spoilt.

PETER: Harriet! You heard Crutchley tell the Superintendent he watered that . . . object . . . and wound the clock before he went to get his wages from old Noakes?

HARRIET: Yes.

PETER: And the day before yesterday you saw Crutchley water it again?

HARRIET: Why, we all saw him.

GOODACRE: But, my dear Lady Peter, he couldn't have done that. The cactus is a desert plant. It only requires watering about once a month in the cooler weather. (*Peering at the cactus again, he breaks off in the middle of his lecture*) Ah! I see you've put it on a longer chain.

HARRIET: A longer chain?

PETER: What's that? (*Enter BUNTER, followed by PUFFETT with CRUTCHLEY in the rear.*)

BUNTER: If it will not inconvenience you, my lord, we can remove the sideboard.

PETER: Oh! carry on. (*They seize upon it, BUNTER down-stage, PUFFETT and CRUTCHLEY at the other end.*) Here! I'll give you a hand.

GOODACRE (*to HARRIET*): Yes. I suppose the old one was unsafe. You get a much better idea of it now. (*Peers at it again.*) Much better.

PUFFETT: Easy does it. Easy. Easy. (*They get it into doorway. PETER strips off his coat, and helps at*

BUNTER's end, and the sideboard goes sweetly through.) *That's done it ! (PETER shuts the door after them, turns, and stands with his back against it.)*

PETER: Now, padre, what's all this about a longer chain ?

GOODACRE: Oh, I imagine the old one was unsafe.

PETER (*coming down-stage*): You're quite certain there's a difference ?

GOODACRE: Oh, positive. Let me see, it used to hang about here (*and he indicates a height just above the level of his own head*). Yes. (*Re-enter BUNTER with clothes-brush, makes purposefully for PETER, and begins solemnly brushing the dust of the sideboard off his trousers. THE VICAR stops abruptly, and gazes with undisguised interest at this ceremony. Enter PUFFETT and CRUTCHLEY. They take up the left-hand settle and begin to carry it away.*)

PETER: That'll do, Bunter. Can't I be dusty if I like ? (*BUNTER smiles indulgently and brushes the other leg.*)

GOODACRE (*not looking as they edge past him with the settle, but automatically getting out of the way*): I am afraid I should give your excellent man many hours of distress if I were his employer. (*Exeunt PUFFETT and CRUTCHLEY.*) My wife is always complaining of my untidiness. (*Then, as his mind catches up with his eye*) Wasn't that Crutchley ? We must ask——

PETER: Bunter, you heard what I said. If Mr. Goodacre likes to be brushed, you can brush him, not me. (*BUNTER crosses at once, and THE VICAR, deflected, beams assent.*)

GOODACRE: Well, really, I am quite sure I need it. (*BUNTER brushes solemnly.*) Being valeted will be quite a new experience for me. (*He is childishly delighted. PETER stands stock-still, his gaze travelling over the room, as he picks up his coat.*)

PETER: Chain. Now where——

GOODACRE: Oh, yes. That is a new chain. The old one matched the pot. Brass.

PETER: Brass? A brass chain——

HARRIET: Peter!

BUNTER (*almost simultaneously*): The drain-pipe, my lord! (PETER jerks his coat on.)

PETER: Yes! (*Steps up to fireplace and tilts drain-pipe on one side, as enter BILL and CRUTCHLEY to take out right-hand settle. BILL approaches up-stage end.*)

BILL: If you don't mind, guv'nor——

PETER: Carry on. (*Then, quickly replacing drain-pipe and sitting on it*) No. As you were. You take yourselves off, and finish with the other stuff first. We must have something to sit on. (CRUTCHLEY turns and goes out.)

BILL: Right y'are, guv'nor. But the job's got to be done to-day.

PETER: It will be.

[BILL follows CRUTCHLEY and shuts the door. As soon as it is shut, PETER gets up, removes drain-pipe, and reveals chain lying on floor; picks it up and comes down-stage to level of radio cabinet with it.]

HARRIET: The chain that came down the chimney.

PETER (*stands looking up at pot*): Somebody fixed up a new chain, and hid the other up the chimney. Now why? (*Leans on cabinet.*)

GOODACRE (*takes chain and examines it*): Now that looks to me very like the original chain.

PETER: Harriet, I want you to watch me carefully, and tell me if I go wrong anywhere. (*They all look at him without speaking.*) Now, think back to Wednesday morning—the day before yesterday—all of us in this room. (*Places himself at the right side of the radio.*) Crutchley is on the steps,

here, watering the cactus which he watered the week before, and which only needs watering once a month——

GOODACRE: —in the colder weather—— (*But PETER, miming all the actions he describes, sweeps on without heeding him. They all follow his movements.*)

PETER: He gets down, picks up the steps, puts 'em over here, picks up the watering can, takes it across——(*crossing to window*)——waters the plants here, comes back——(*crossing right over again to steps*)——puts down the can, and then—— (*He breaks off, comes back to the right side of the radio, and stands there.*) Can you remember what he did then? (*There is dead silence for a moment.*)

HARRIET: Peter! I believe—— (*PETER puts his hands on either side of the cabinet.*) Peter! He did! He moved the cabinet, under the pot, as it is now. I was sitting here, at the end of the settle, and the cabinet was right up against it! That's why I noticed!

GOODACRE: This is all very mysterious——

PETER: I was quite certain, really. (*He edges the cabinet towards the centre of the room until he is standing directly beneath the pot.*)

GOODACRE: I'm afraid I'm being very stupid—— (*PETER touches the pot with his finger, so that it just swings very slightly, and lifts the lid of the radio gently twice.*)

PETER: Like this! Like this! London calling! Yes, my God, it's possible! Bunter, get those steps, and measure these chains. (*While BUNTER gets the steps, PETER takes the chain from the VICAR and looks at him as he stands there.*) Mr. Noakes was about your height, wasn't he?

GOODACRE: Well, yes. Possibly he had the advantage of me by an inch or so. (*BUNTER seizes curtain-rod propped against wall; mounts steps. MISS TWITTERTON enters.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: It is nice to think you're having Uncle's cactus, Mr. Goodacre.

PETER (*very quickly, and crossing to Miss TWITTERTON*): Yes. Bunter is just coping with it. Miss Twitterton—(*planting himself between her and BUNTER*)—if you've really finished, I wonder if you would do something for me?

MISS TWITTERTON: But of course. If I can.

PETER: I think I must have dropped my fountain-pen somewhere in the bedroom; and I'm rather afraid one of those fellows up there may put his foot on it, or something. I wonder . . . (*BUNTER measures chain of cactus against the curtain-rod.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: But of course, Lord Peter. I'll run up and look for it at once. I always say I'm very good at finding things.

PETER (*manœuvring her back to the staircase*): Sure you don't mind?

MISS TWITTERTON: I like looking for things! (*BUNTER comes down, and he and GOODACRE measure chain against rod.*)

HARRIET: Peter! (*She comes up beside him.*)

PETER: Yes I know. (*Indicating fountain-pen in his pocket.*) She must not leave this house or communicate with Crutchley. Well, Bunter?

BUNTER: A good four inches difference, my lord.

PETER (*to HARRIET*): Lock the back door and bring the key here. If anybody goes out by the front we shall see them. (*HARRIET goes without an instant's hesitation.*) Bunter, take the steps up there, and see if you can find anything in the nature of a hook or a pulley anywhere on that wall or in the ceiling. (*He walks up to the fireplace while speaking, and points up to the corner beside it.*) Pretty high. Probably in that beam. (*BUNTER arrives with steps the other side of the settle.*) Straight line from the settle. (*BUNTER mounts quickly and*

begins to feel about.) Well? No. A little more that way. That's it. (THE VICAR hovers behind PETER.) Anything? (Pause.)

BUNTER: Yes, my lord. Here. There's a large cup-hook in this beam.

GOODACRE: A hook? (PETER measures from the cabinet to the wall with his eye.)

PETER: Bunter, you didn't happen to pick up a very long piece of twine from this floor on Wednesday morning? (Enter HARRIET.)

BUNTER (*as he comes down*): No, my lord.

PETER: Twine. Or string. . . . String! Of course! Bunter! Get Puffett in here. Quickly.

BUNTER: Certainly, my lord. (*Exit quickly and quietly.*)

HARRIET (*walking down-stage and handing PETER key across the back of the settle*): Here's the key. They're all busy packing up the scullery things. (PETER slips it into his trouser pocket.) I don't think anyone heard me.

PETER: Padre, will you keep an eye on that window for me?

GOODACRE: Of course.

PETER (*looking round the nearly stripped room*): We'd better get this out of sight. (*Picking up chain.*) Now where on earth— By Jove! The place where the other chap put it. (*Goes quickly up to the fireplace, dives in under cowl, feels round on the left, deposits chain.*)

HARRIET (*as he emerges*): I suppose there was a ledge?

PETER: Yes. If it hadn't been for Puffett—
[Enter BUNTER with PUFFETT.]

PUFFETT: You want me, me lord?

PETER: Puffett, when you were tidying up in here on Wednesday morning, do you remember

picking up a piece of string or twine from the floor ?

PUFFETT: String ? Reckon if I sees a bit o' string, me lord, I picks it up and puts it away, same as the rest of us. (*He begins pulling rolls of it out of his various pockets.*)

PETER: I don't mean your own bits for tying up your rods. You're sure there wasn't another bit ?

PUFFETT: Not string, me lord. (*Shakes his head solemnly.*) Not as I remembers. But I'll tell you what I did find, if it's any use to you, and that was a good long bit of black fishin' line.

PETER: Of course ! That'll be it. Have you got it on you still ?

PUFFETT (*still turning out more pieces*): Surely. Safe bind, safe find, as I says at the time to Frank Crutchley. 'Ere you are, me lord. That wot you wants ? (*Offers him large roll of twine.*)

PETER: H'm. This would hold a twenty-pound salmon. (*Unrolls it rapidly as he speaks.*) And sinkers on both ends.

PUFFETT: That's right, me lord. That's why I'd take me Alfred Davey on it, noticin' them at the time. (*PETER rapidly runs the twine through one of the rings on the pot.*)

PETER: Now then, Bunter, both ends over the hook. (*Walks up-stage with them held tight. BUNTER runs up the ladder, and PETER hands the strings to him.*)

HARRIET: Good heavens, Peter, I think I see. (*BUNTER passes strings over hook.*)

PETER: Now, haul the pot up. (*BUNTER begins hauling. PUFFETT and PETER push the pot as BUNTER goes on till the pot is nearly up to the ceiling.*) It's all right. The plant won't fall out. It's a dead tight fit—steady. (*BUNTER stops.*)

GOODACRE: Pray be careful, my man. If that

thing was to slip and come down it might easily kill somebody.

PETER (*grimly*): That's what I was thinking.

BUNTER: It must weigh getting on for half a hundredweight.

PETER: It's been loaded at the bottom with lead or something. (BUNTER gives the strings to PETER.)

HARRIET: Then that's how a woman could have done it.

PETER: Yes. Or somebody who wasn't here at the time. (BUNTER comes down the steps. PETER tests the length and pull of the strings. They reach exactly to the radio cabinet when he relaxes their pull slightly. KIRK and SELLON, unnoticed, appear at the window.)

HARRIET: The man with the cast-iron alibi. (PETER opens the lid with his left hand, puts ends underneath, and shuts it down.)

[A knock at the window makes them all start. KIRK and SELLON are both beckoning excitedly. PETER hurries across and opens the lattice, while BUNTER folds up the steps and puts them against the wall again.]

PETER (*as he opens the window*): What's the matter?

KIRK AND SELLON (*together*): My lord—

SELLON: My lord, I never told you no lie! You can see the clock from this window. Look! (PETER puts his head on a level with theirs and looks.)

KIRK: He's right. Just on half past twelve. Clear as anything.

PETER: You'd better come along in. (*Crosses quickly back to centre. KIRK and SELLON vanish.*)

PUFFETT: That's an orkerd-lookin' arrangement 'yours, me lord. You're dead sure it won't come down?

PETER: Not unless somebody opens the cabinet for the 12.30 gramophone orgy. (*They all recoil, except GOODACRE, who advances to the radio.*) For God's sake don't touch that lid! (*THE VICAR retires, guiltily, down-stage L.*)

HARRIET: Peter! Will that line hold? It's so fine that it's practically invisible against the panelling. (*She comes round in front of the cabinet as she speaks, looking at the string; moves up-stage L., still commenting by her gaze on its invisibility.*)

PETER: That's the idea of fishing-line. But it will hold all right.

[*Enter KIRK and SELLON. PETER, GOODACRE, HARRIET, BUNTER and PUFFETT are all gazing at the swung pot. KIRK and SELLON both follow the direction of their glances and see the pot.*]

(*As KIRK looks inquiry at him*) Yes. But don't go near the cabinet either of you. (*KIRK peers closely, and realises the string; goes up to touch it.*) And don't anyone touch that string.

KIRK: You saw the clock for yourself, my lord. (*Comes over to PETER to left of cabinet.*)

PETER: I did. I think this—reconstruction—explains why Sellon was able to see the clock at 9 on Wednesday night. And I think Sellon's story proves this reconstruction. Don't you?

KIRK: Reconstruction, my lord? (*SELLON comes down-stage R. MRS. RUDDLE creeps in quietly and stands near door.*)

PETER: We were looking for the blunt instrument that killed Mr. Noakes—well, there it is. (*Everybody turns to PETER.*)

KIRK: Any traces of blood or hair on it, my lord?

PETER: No. The pot was wiped—When? How? (*But he knows the answer already.*)

HARRIET (*she has seen it too*): Why, not till las

Wednesday morning ! The day before yesterday ! Under our very eyes, while we all sat round and said nothing. That's HOW, Peter; that's HOW.

PETER: Yes. That's HOW. And now we know HOW—we know WHO.

GOODACRE: You mean when Frank Crutchley watered the cactus and wiped the pot. Oh ! But that is a dreadful conclusion to come to ! Frank Crutchley—one of my own choirmen.

KIRK: Would any jury believe that for a matter of forty pound——

PETER: *And the heiress.*

GOODACRE: The heiress ?

PETER: Miss Twitterton—he meant to marry her.

HARRIET: It's true, Mr. Kirk.

KIRK: D'you think they were in it together ?
(*To PETER. Enter Miss TWITTERTON.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Lord Peter, I can't find your fountain-pen anywhere. I do hope—— Why, however did Uncle's cactus get up there ? (*She heads straight for the cabinet, with every intention of leaning on it while looking up at the pot. PETER catches hold of her, pulls her back.*)

PETER: Just a minute, Miss Twitterton. Mr. Goodacre, do you mind ? (*GOODACRE takes Miss TWITTERTON down-stage L. PETER to HARRIET and KIRK*) No, I don't think so.

MISS TWITTERTON (*looking up at GOODACRE in bewilderment*): What is it all about ?

KIRK: How, exactly, do you suggest he worked it, my lord ?

PETER: If that trap was set on the night of the murder, say, when somebody left the house at twenty past six—— (*They all work slightly down-stage during this conversation.*)

MISS TWITTERTON: Why, that was when Frank Crutchley left——

PETER: Then when Mr. Noakes came in——
(*Looks round room and sees standard-lamp left by window.*) Look, I'll show you. (*Gets lamp, brings it down-stage to cabinet, and places it at lower right-hand corner.*) Mr. Noakes was about your height, wasn't he? (*Looking at KIRK, who stands centre stage.*)

KIRK: Yes. A little taller. (PETER *adjusts lamp so that globe is about level with KIRK's head.*)

PETER: Then when Mr. Noakes came in, as he always did, to turn on the radio at half past nine——

HARRIET: But could anybody walk right up to that radio without noticing that the cactus had gone?

KIRK: It was dark—there were only two candles——

PETER: You'd do it automatically. (*Door opens suddenly, and enter CRUTCHLEY.*) Why, even in broad daylight——

CRUTCHLEY (*half-way across to cabinet as he speaks: he calls over his right shoulder to the men outside*): Right. I'll get it and lock it up for you. (*This brings him abreast of the cabinet. PETER turns sharply at his voice.*)

PETER: What do you want, Crutchley?

CRUTCHLEY: Key of the radio, my lord. (*Still looking at PETER, he opens the lid of the cabinet with his left hand. There is a general gasp, exclamations of "look out" and a shriek from MRS. RUDDLE make CRUTCHLEY look round with a terror-stricken face as the heavy pot thrashes down like a flail, skimming within an inch or so of his head and shattering the lamp-globe to fragments. There is an awestruck silence, as they watch the furiously swinging pot.*)

(*To PETER*) You devil ! You damned cunning devil ! How did you know ? Curse you, how did you know I done it ? I'll have the life out of you ! (*He makes for PETER, but SELLON and KIRK, one from each side, rush forward and seize him. BUNTER catches the pot and stops it swinging.*)

(*Beside himself*) So you set a trap for me, did you ? Well, I killed him. The old brute ! The old cheat ! He took my forty pounds. He—he—he—let me go, blast you ! I killed him, I tell you, and all for nothing ! He cheated me to the last !

KIRK: Frank Crutchley, I arrest you—
(*HARRIET turns away and moves up to window. The rest of the words are drowned in CRUTCHLEY'S frenzied shouts.*)

GOODACRE: This is a most shocking thing.

MISS TWITTERTON: How horrible ! Keep him off ! To think that I ever let him come near me !
(*CRUTCHLEY is dragged out, struggling, by KIRK and SELLON, PUFFETT assisting. MISS TWITTERTON runs off after them, crying excitedly: How dare you kill poor Uncle ? THE VICAR picks up his surplice, stole, etc.*)

GOODACRE: Forgive me, Lady Peter. My duty is with that unhappy young man. (*He follows them out. PETER remains down-stage, a prey to nervous reaction after this hateful scene. In the confusion of the arrest MRS. RUDDLE has been jostled down-stage and up against the wireless cabinet. The string hanging from the ring of the pot brushes against her face. She starts, sees what it is, takes hold of it.*)

MRS. RUDDLE: Now that's funny, that is. There was a piece-er string 'angin' up jes' like this on Wednesday mornin' when I come in with them dust-sheets. I took it down myself ! (*She looks round accusingly; but PETER and HARRIET are both beyond taking in even this shattering announcement, and after a moment's hesitation it penetrates at*

last, even to MRS. RUDDLE's understanding, that she is not wanted. She hurries out quietly.)

HARRIET: Peter ! *(She comes down-stage to him.)*

PETER: This part of the business always gets me down. *(His hand goes out blindly for comfort. HARRIET takes it—he pulls her to him.)* Don't leave me.

HARRIET: You shan't be left.

PETER: Never again.

HARRIET: I feel as if the evil spirit had been cast out of this house, and left it clean for you and me.

PETER: For you and me ! *(They embrace, down-stage centre. GEORGE and BILL enter simultaneously back and left and begin to roll up the rug from opposite ends. As they reach the feet of the pre-occupied couple in the centre*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

NOTE TO PRODUCERS

THE CACTUS POT is an instrument of precision: i.e. a pendulum. It is also, potentially, a lethal weapon. The method described in Act III, Scene ii, will work, but it is dangerous, and should not be attempted. The effect should be faked, nor is it difficult to do this. Individual producers will doubtless work out their own methods, which will be governed by the means at their disposal.

However the faking is done, the following "safety-first" measures are essential.

(1) The pot should be made of nothing heavier than the lightest pressed brass—the cheap "bazaar" article.

(2) It should carry only the minimum of weight necessary to steady the swing and make an effective crash. (This necessary minimum must be found by experiment, and will probably be provided by the cactus and whatever is used to secure it. Real earth is too heavy and must on no account be used.)

(3) All chains, cables, etc., should be of such quality as to guarantee safety, and should all be used in duplicate (except for the scaffold chain, as used in the London production, which needs no extra strengthening).

(4) The height from the ground of the bottom of the pot is determined by Crutchley's height, which is the only "real" measurement. A safety margin of *at least* two inches should be allowed. The height should be tested by the person responsible, *and also by Crutchley*, before every performance.

The length of the chain is finally governed by the depth of the scene; though it should be remembered that *the shorter the chain the swifter the swing*, and the swifter the swing the more effective it is.

The maximum length of the chain (plus the pot) cannot exceed the distance between the radio cabinet and the back-wall of the scene. The maximum of the chain, however, only equals the minimum radio-to-back-wall measurement, for which a maximum can be determined at will, if there is space to spare. The fixed minimum distance from the radio to the floats must always be greater than the total height of the

standard lamp; otherwise this will be knocked into the floats. The lamp used in the London production measures 6 ft. 3 ins. from base to top of globe.

For the apparatus as designed by Mr. Anmer Hall's Stage Director, Mr. Harold Arneil, a pot of ten inches diameter at the top with a depth of eight inches is used. It is attached to its chain by three 20-inch lengths of $\frac{3}{8}$ in. brass chain, strengthened by similar lengths of $\frac{1}{8}$ in. flex cable. These six lengths pass through three equidistant holes drilled through the sides of the pot just below its rim, and are made fast inside.

The chain is a $\frac{1}{2}$ in. scaffold chain, ten feet long. It is apparently hung from a beam in the ceiling, but actually runs through the beam and is attached above it to two cables. One of these cables, of $\frac{1}{4}$ in. galvanised flex, is made fast permanently to the roof of the theatre. Its length is calculated so that the pot cannot drop any lower than 5 ft. 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins. from floor level. As any cable could be affected by stretch a second cable of $\frac{3}{8}$ in. galvanised flex is also attached to the scaffold chain at the same point. This second cable is carried up to the grid. It then runs along the grid, and is brought down outside the set (wall R.) to stage level, and attached to the scenery. If, when tested, it is found that the 5 ft. 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins. measurement has varied in any way the height of the pot can be adjusted by this second cable.

The method of faking the hauling-up of the pot, and its fall, is as follows:

The twine handed to Lord Peter is wound round a piece of wood to prevent it becoming knotted or entangled. It is a single length, 26 ft. long, with both ends tied separately to the ring of a snap-hook. This doubled line, when handed to Bunter, gives the appearance of two strings, each 13 ft. long. The length of this line is governed by the distance from the radio to the back of the scene, plus an allowance for pulling through and tying off behind the scene.

Lord Peter clips the hook on to one of the rings on the pot, and hands the strings to Bunter. Bunter does not do the actual hauling-up, however. A "both ends over the hook" he slips his looped line over a button-hook which is pushed through a 1 in

diameter hole in the back of the set. The strings are then pulled through, and the pot is pulled up into position by the men behind, the strings being made fast to a large screw-eye. At the same time, on the stage, the hauling-up is apparently being done as described. What is actually used, however, is a single string with a nut tied to the end, which comes through a small hole a few inches below the one for working the pot. This string is fixed to a screw-eye behind, and a reasonable length is paid out ready for Bunter while he is dealing with the double line. Its length is exactly calculated so that it stretches tautly to the radio. When Bunter is apparently hauling on the double strings he is actually pulling the single string through its hole; and when Peter puts its end under the lid of the radio the nut holds it in place. On the verbal cue, "Key of the *radio*, my lord," the double line is cut behind the scenes, at such a point as to leave a sufficient length attached to the pot for Mrs. Ruddle's final comment. As the double line is cut, the single fake line is automatically released by the opening of the lid of the radio, and drops to the floor unobserved.

The globe of the lamp must be secured to the oil-container, and the container must be secured to the standard, otherwise both globe and container will be knocked over the floats. The globes used are ordinary glass, and can be obtained from the Strand Electric, 24 Floral Street, W.C.2 (size 7" x 7"). The outside of the globe must be covered with something to prevent splinters flying. Butter-muslin, glued on and covered with whitewash, works well, and the effect is that of opaque white glass.

The amateur producer who has no grid or roof could hang the pot from a *rigid* steel or iron rod, masked in by a canvas "beam," or hidden behind a beam border, provided he has proper means of support for his rod. The real difficulty that he will be liable to encounter will be lack of sufficient depth on a small stage. It is not difficult to alter the design of the set and the lay-out of the furniture so that the cactus can swing from left to right or from right to left. For the actual "reconstruction" climax either would work well and look effective. The stage, however, has no fourth wall; and this means that the

producer who makes this alteration must accept the risk of forcing a card on his audience: i.e. anyone who takes the trouble to think it out will realise that, given this altered lay-out of the room, the murder itself would not have taken place. Unless the cactus was hauled-up to another wall than that on which the clock was hung Noakes would have seen the pot when he held the candle up to the clock at 9.5 p.m. If it had been hauled-up to the opposite wall, then *either* Noakes would have collided with the string as he went up to the window to speak to Sellon, *or* Crutchley would have had to take the risk of Noakes's colliding with it at any time between 6.20 and 9.30 if he crossed the room in order to go upstairs (according to whether, in the altered design, the main door is set up- or down-stage). The least improbable lay-out for a side-to-side swing will be: window as at present, back L.; main door R. as at present, up-stage, with staircase door set opposite, upstage L.; fireplace, down- or mid-stage, R.; settle above fire. at right-angles to it, with radio at end; clock above fireplace; cactus to be hauled-up to wall L. This is suitable for a small stage, where the distance between radio and wall R. and radio and wall L. is practically the same. But it must also be remembered that a string running from R. to L. is going to be much more noticeable in the daylight lighting of the reconstruction scene than is a string running from the back-wall down-stage, which is practically invisible.

IN THEATRE STREET

H. R. Lenormand

IN THEATRE STREET

A Play

In Two Parts

English Version by Ashley Dukes

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In Theatre Street was produced on April 28th, 1937, at the Mercury Theatre, London, with the following cast:

<i>Electrician</i>	ANTHONY MARLOWE
<i>Producer</i>	IAN DAWSON
<i>Property Man</i>	ALAN EDMISTON
<i>Manager</i>	CHARLES MAUNSELL
<i>Film Vice-President</i>	ERIC MESSITER
<i>Actress</i>	VIVIENNE BENNETT
<i>Author</i>	FRANCIS JAMES
<i>Character Man</i>	HUGH GRANT
<i>Character Woman</i>	WINIFRED EVANS
<i>Actor</i>	WILFRID WALTER
<i>Messenger Girl</i>	JENNIFER SKINNER
<i>Leading Lady</i>	HERMIONE GINGOLD
<i>Comedian</i>	BRUCE MOIR
<i>Rag-and-Bone Man</i>	PETER BENNETT
<i>President of the Globe Film Corporation</i>	} GEORGE COURTNEY
<i>Film Director</i>	ANTHONY MARLOWE
<i>Continuity Writer</i>	PETER BENNETT
<i>Two members of the Board</i>	{ RAYMOND GUYLER NOEL WOOLF

Produced by E. MARTIN BROWNE

Settings by ANDRÉ BICÂT

Thanks are due to the author for the generous consent he has given to certain changes made in the text of the play.

A. D.

PERSONS (*as they appear*)

ELECTRICIAN
PRODUCER
PROPERTY MAN
MANAGER
FILM VICE-PRESIDENT
AUTHOR
ACTRESS
CHARACTER MAN
CHARACTER WOMAN
ACTOR
MESSENGER GIRL (*afterwards* SHOW GIRL)
LEADING LADY
COMEDIAN
RAG-AND-BONE MAN
and in the Board Room Scene
PRESIDENT OF GLOBE FILM CORPORATION
FILM DIRECTOR
CONTINUITY WRITER
TWO MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

SCENES

PART I

SCENE I: The stage of a theatre.

A dramatic interlude (optional)

SCENE II: The stage, a fortnight later.

PART II

SCENE I: Board-room of the Globe Film Corporation.

SCENE II: The stage, the same evening.

SCENE III: The stage, three months later.

The time is the present

The play can, if desired, be presented in three acts, with intervals following Part I, Scene 1, and Part II, Scene 11.

PART I

SCENE I

The bare stage of a theatre, nearly dark.

ELECTRICIAN *enters, crosses to switchboard, and puts on enough lights for rehearsal. It is then seen that chairs stand in irregular lines on the stage, to mark the outline of a set. ELECTRICIAN goes off, mounting a ladder. PRODUCER enters and goes to a table on prompt side, taking papers from a case. Then, noticing something in the wings, he crosses and pulls into view a life-size property figure of a classical personage holding a lyre.*

PRODUCER: Props ! Props ! Where the devil—
Props !

[PROPERTY MAN *enters.*

Look here, what's this ?

PROPERTY MAN: Oh, *him* ! He's the poet, sir,
out of Act Three.

PRODUCER: Don't try to be funny. You were
told to mend all the props, this lyre especially.

PROPERTY MAN: He's past it, that poet is.
Hand drops off one minute, head the next.
And now the blinkin' lyre.

PRODUCER: All that it wants is two new strings.
Here, take it.

PROPERTY MAN: Very good, sir.

PRODUCER: And have it ready for to-night, do
you hear ? Not like last night's match-box. You
know our leading lady found it empty in the
second act ?

PROPERTY MAN: What, her match-box, sir ?

PRODUCER: She had to go off stage to get her
candle lighted. That got a laugh in front.

PROPERTY MAN: Wonderful, sir, what *will*
amuse them.

PRODUCER: Better leave that job to the company—they do it without *your* help.

PROPERTY MAN: Yes, sir.

PRODUCER: Your trouble's the bar over the way. I know. Now get this thing mended.

PROPERTY MAN: Yes, sir. (*To property figure*)
Come on, sonny—don't forget your lyre!

[*He goes off with figure. PRODUCER looks at watch.*]

PRODUCER: All late as usual. (*Sits at table.*)

[*Enter together the MANAGER and FILM VICE-PRESIDENT.*]

MANAGER: There, sir, there! Welcome to *my* theatre!

VICE-PRESIDENT: This it?

MANAGER: Why, certainly! My theatre!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Proud of it, eh?

[*PRODUCER, seeing them, has risen.*]

MANAGER: Let me introduce you to my producer—or stage director, you would call him. Our distinguished visitor, Vice-President of the Globe Film Corporation.

PRODUCER: How do you do?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Pleased to meet you.

MANAGER: And now shall we have our little business chat?

PRODUCER: You'll excuse me.

[*PRODUCER goes off.*]

MANAGER: Now, sir, what do you think of my theatre?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Pretty ramshackle old dump.

MANAGER: Old, I grant you. Like its reputation.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Mouldy, too.

MANAGER: I have been its manager these thirty years.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Not worth a dollar more for that.

MANAGER: Come, come, a name will always count.

VICE-PRESIDENT: If my Corporation buys it, you can keep the name, *and* the walls as well.

MANAGER: Walls?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Bricks and mortar, when we've pulled 'em down. Souvenirs.

MANAGER: You're not serious?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Think we're in the museum line ourselves? No, sir. We buy a site for steel and concrete.

MANAGER: But my theatre walls—you might as well tear me limb from limb!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Not in the surgical profession either—just the movie business.

MANAGER: I must reconsider the question of selling.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Ah!

MANAGER: Everyone knows the sacrifices I have made to art. My public look to me to support a sacred cause.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Is that why the place is always let to actresses and backers?

MANAGER (*with dignity*): I may have been unable to bear all the risks myself. But this has always been a theatre. Now, I regret, it is for sale.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Then what's your price?

MANAGER: Hum. What is your Corporation's offer?

VICE-PRESIDENT: If I name a figure, you'll ask double right away.

MANAGER: If I name one, you'll offer a quarter.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Big business, little business. I divide by four, you only multiply by two.

MANAGER: Just let me show you the house.

VICE-PRESIDENT: I can see it plain enough from here.

MANAGER: Do you know what Paramount offered me, only this year? Sixty thousand, cash down!

VICE-PRESIDENT: You don't say?

MANAGER: Yes, I assure you.

[VICE-PRESIDENT *turns to go*.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Sorry you *have* been troubled.

MANAGER: You're not going?

VICE-PRESIDENT: You must be crazy to refuse sixty thousand for a hencoop not worth twenty.

MANAGER: Twenty! My dear sir!

VICE-PRESIDENT: But I should say you never want to sell at all, you only want to play at selling. Five thousand on your price means an extra fifty on the rent you charge your leading ladies.

MANAGER: Oh! Oh!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Your present leading lady for one. Yes, sir. My Corporation is well informed before it makes a business offer.

MANAGER: But if you knew what she costs me every week——

VICE-PRESIDENT: You mean what she costs her backer? Dare say your theatre's the biggest item on *his* weekly bill.

MANAGER: Suppose we go and jot down a few figures? Just to make the situation clear?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Might as well ask you a question first.

MANAGER: Well?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Do you ever happen to go to jail?

MANAGER: I don't follow you.

VICE-PRESIDENT: If you went to jail there would be a receivership. Receivers are hard men to do business with, but easier than artists of your sort.

MANAGER: You will have your joke. But listen, my figures will be reasonable.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Jot them down, then, jot them down. I'll come!

[MANAGER and VICE-PRESIDENT go off together.

PRODUCER re-enters and returns to his table.

PRODUCER (looking at his watch): Still late!

[The young ACTRESS and AUTHOR enter together and overhear him.

ACTRESS: That's a good line. (To AUTHOR) Remember it for your next play.

AUTHOR: "Still late." Thank you.

PRODUCER (returning to his papers): Not at all.

[ACTRESS seats herself, and AUTHOR takes a chair from one of the lines on the stage and draws it up to hers.

AUTHOR: May I sit here?

PRODUCER (looking up): Excuse me, that was one of our mountain crags you just shifted.

AUTHOR: Oh, sorry.

[He replaces chair and takes another from the wings, drawing it up to the ACTRESS as before.

ACTRESS: Nobody but an author would dare to move mountains!

AUTHOR: I was afraid of being last at this rehearsal, instead of first, as it appears.

ACTRESS: Thanks to me, please.

AUTHOR: Yes, thanks to you.

ACTRESS: The others only dare to be late because of *her*. They know she will be last.

AUTHOR: To-day, it is true, I was working with her myself till after lunch-time.

ACTRESS: You're generous to find excuses for her.

AUTHOR: One must admit she has energy, vitality.

ACTRESS: So has my dressmaker. I always admire her for it.

AUTHOR: Anything can happen in the next fortnight.

ACTRESS: Everything can happen—everything must happen! A rehearsal must be hour after hour of wonders, until there comes the last miracle of performance!

AUTHOR: How passionately you still speak of this work of yours! You remind me all the while that I am nothing but a poet.

ACTRESS: A famous poet, brought to the theatre at last!

AUTHOR: Into this strange world that is your whole life. Perhaps that's what makes a true actress so—so impersonal.

ACTRESS: Yes, we're public women. Men who like private women hate us in their hearts.

[A silence. The PRODUCER glances at them, then resumes his notes.]

AUTHOR: By the way, I wanted to tell you. Your costume in the last scene shouldn't be too conspicuous—or else I shall tremble for the play.

ACTRESS: You mean all my lines may disappear?

AUTHOR: I feel I may be asked to cut the scene.

ACTRESS: That's to be expected.

AUTHOR: Of course, I shall refuse.

ACTRESS: Thank you, dear author. But if I went on in that scene in black, and played it like a nun, she would want to cut it all the same. (*At a movement from him*) Yes, and sooner or later it would be done; she would get her way. After the first night if not before.

AUTHOR: All this morning I thought of what might have been done with that part. I mean if *you* had played it. And now I find it hard to be just to her.

ACTRESS: Let's give up trying. But I warn you I shall play it yet. Maybe on tour, in some town where there are gas-lamps in the rain, and authors never come to see their plays.

AUTHOR: All the while you are there—you, the very character waiting to come to life! And instead you have to struggle for the dozen lines of your own part! You have to stand by and watch this travesty! Will the public ever guess the truth?

ACTRESS: No, they must take for granted what they see before their eyes.

AUTHOR: How wrong I was to let her have the play at all! I should have waited for you!

ACTRESS: But how would that have helped us? I shall never "run" a theatre.

AUTHOR: It's just that "running" that revolts me.

ACTRESS: Should we ever have met again, but for her? Let us think only what a joy it is to work together again. In spite of everything, the

world is still trembling eagerly for my new scene to be played and your new drama to be born.

[A CHARACTER MAN and CHARACTER WOMAN have come in together and stand chatting with the PRODUCER.

CHARACTER MAN: Not here yet?

CHARACTER WOMAN: Of course not—you needn't tell me that.

CHARACTER MAN: I never knew such lack of consideration for a company.

CHARACTER WOMAN: Nor I, in all my experience. The greater the star the greater the punctuality; that is the rule.

CHARACTER MAN: And to keep waiting such a company as this!

PRODUCER: I shall apologise myself directly.

[Enter an ACTOR of about fifty, the LEADING MAN, with expressive features and assured gestures.

ACTOR: Afternoon, all. I suppose half an hour late means half an hour early. Time for a cup of coffee over the way. Send me word when she arrives.

[He goes out again.

CHARACTER WOMAN: There's one of us at least who refuses to be put upon.

CHARACTER MAN: No, dear, he only knows his place as leading man.

CHARACTER WOMAN: I wish you knew it as well!

CHARACTER MAN: There was a time when I did.

[The pair go off into the wings. Meanwhile the AUTHOR and ACTRESS continue their conversation.

AUTHOR: But here we are, in a kind of theatre I never dreamed of, and it seems to be shaping our lives—I mean personally. You and I, for instance, were free enough when first we met—and even for long afterwards. Why was there nothing personal between us then?

ACTRESS: We were always friends.

AUTHOR: But to this day everybody believes we are lovers.

ACTRESS: Yes, it often amuses me to think how wrong they are.

AUTHOR: I should be happier if they were right.

ACTRESS (*smiling*): Thank you, said the lady, that was very nicely put.

AUTHOR: Do you know that my conscience reproaches me?

ACTRESS: With a good opportunity for love-making lost?

AUTHOR: What could be better than the making perfect of a friendship?

ACTRESS: I suppose we both find it natural to hold this conversation on a stage. In a drawing-room, even in a bedroom, it would be absurd. But here we sit among the bits of scenery waiting for rehearsal, and you suddenly become as romantic as any character you create. I find you for a moment dangerous—and then I remember this is a world of make-believe.

AUTHOR: Only tell me—what was it that ever held us apart?

ACTRESS: Just the unreality of our world. We were lost in mists of our own and could never touch each other.

AUTHOR: To me it was the people in the real world who were not alive.

ACTRESS: I felt that too, and I never wanted to cross the boundary that was set between yourself and life. Perhaps I thought it was enchanted.

AUTHOR: Oh, I crossed it myself too often ! Not to live in any true sense, but to forget and be intoxicated by senses utterly outside my dreams. What men call love was nothing to me but a sort of drunkenness—one brutal adventure after another, quickly begun, quickly ended and forgotten. Now you will hardly think my tone so romantic !

[*The CHARACTER MAN and CHARACTER WOMAN re-enter.*]

CHARACTER MAN: Nearly an hour late ! That's too much !

CHARACTER WOMAN: In the name of the whole company, you should speak to her.

CHARACTER MAN: Hum ! You think so ? Very good, I will !

CHARACTER WOMAN: Meaning that you won't.

CHARACTER MAN: I will, I most certainly—but hullo, what's this ?

[*A MESSENGER GIRL with an enormous cardboard box has struggled on to the stage through a doorway.*]

GIRL: If you please, sir, a pair of wings.

CHARACTER MAN: Wings !

GIRL: Yes, sir, lady's wings. Sign, please !

PRODUCER: Wings—and still the woman's late

[*A woman's voice outside.*]

CHARACTER MAN: At last !

CHARACTER WOMAN: Then speak for all of u do you hear ?

[*The LEADING LADY enters—a woman of thirty-five, active and determined.*]

LEADING LADY: What ! Not rehearsing yet ?

CHARACTER MAN: Dear, you must admit there are——

[*She cuts him short.*]

LEADING LADY: But why not—can you tell me why not ? Can anybody tell me ?

CHARACTER MAN: You see, we were waiting——

LEADING LADY: But why should anybody wait ? You have lots of little bits without me—*they* need rehearsing badly enough ! You might have got on with them instead of gossiping.

CHARACTER WOMAN: Gossiping !

LEADING LADY: I produce this play in ten days, whether you like it or not !

PRODUCER: Did you say ten days ?

LEADING LADY: Yes, I decided it this morning. I have a theatre on my hands, remember ! I have rent and a company to pay !

CHARACTER MAN: But we must protest——

LEADING LADY: Protest ? Against what ?

CHARACTER MAN: Dear, you see—you see——

LEADING LADY: Well ?

CHARACTER MAN (*weakly*): Our leading man's not here.

LEADING LADY: Not here ! Three o'clock, and rehearsal called for two ! Where is he ?

PRODUCER: Just over the way. Go and fetch him, somebody ! Props ! Tell him everybody's here !

[*The PROPERTY MAN crosses the stage and goes slowly out.*]

LEADING LADY: That man seems to be walking in his sleep.

PRODUCER: He worked overtime last night, painting the icefield for the new play.

LEADING LADY: We all work overtime. I work overtime. The author too.

[She comes to the AUTHOR, ignoring the young ACTRESS by his side, who rises to make room for her.]

The author—to think they kept you waiting all this while !

AUTHOR (*embarrassed*): But really, not a moment was lost.

LEADING LADY (*acidly*): Some of the company, I notice, will always entertain you.

ACTRESS: Oh ! (*She moves away.*)

LEADING LADY: I wanted to tell you something important—I thought of it at lunch. Never mind, I shall remember presently. Well, what are we waiting for ?

PRODUCER: Your wings have come.

LEADING LADY: What, my wings have come ? Why did nobody tell me ?

[She pounces on the cardboard box.]

ACTRESS: I think my little scene's in danger.

AUTHOR: I'm afraid you may be right.

LEADING LADY: Quickly, quickly ! These wings should have been unpacked long ago ! You all had time enough !

[The wings are brought out, with much rustling of silk and paper. Meanwhile the ACTOR appears, followed by the PROPERTY MAN, who crosses the stage in the background.]

ACTOR: What, still not begun ? Props and costumes now !

LEADING LADY: Plenty of time before I came !

ACTOR (*to AUTHOR*): I'm word-perfect in the first scene.

AUTHOR: Thank you.

ACTOR (*to* ACTRESS): And in your last one, dear—thought it might help.

ACTRESS: I believe that scene will come out.

ACTOR: Out—nonsense! One of the best scenes in the play. You're in it; so am I.

ACTRESS: She'll have it out.

ACTOR: Hum! Leave her to me if she tries.

[*The MESSENGER GIRL is still waiting.*]

LEADING LADY: Where is the girl who brought these? I ask you, what's this? Did I explain everything at your workrooms, or did I not? Have you got nobody with sense enough to understand? These are angel's wings! Or archangel's or Beelzebub's if you like—but not bird's wings! Only look at them!

PRODUCER: Could we perhaps deal with that later?

LEADING LADY: No, the girl must take the message back! If I'm to be a seagull, I insist on seagull's wings! And they must go right round me like a wrap! Take these away!

GIRL: Yes, madam.

LEADING LADY: You can tell your people I'm very dissatisfied. In fact, this is the last time I order wings.

GIRL: Very good, madam.

LEADING LADY: Now what about my penguins here?

GIRL: Penguins, madam?

CHARACTER MAN: Ours, of course, are only flappers.

LEADING LADY: Whatever they are—when will they be ready?

GIRL: Everything on Saturday, madam.

LEADING LADY: Wings with a clasp at the back— whoever heard of such a thing? And why not wings in tulle when we have the material ready?

GIRL: That was for the last play, madam.

LEADING LADY: Use it for this one! I want bird's wings, made to fasten on the arm and wrist! Else how can I play my scenes? Tell your people I'm a gull! A seagull, do you understand? Sea—gull! Gull!

PRODUCER (*to GIRL*): Off with you.

[*He helps her off stage with her box.*]

GIRL: A gull, is she? Must lay hard-boiled eggs!

[*GIRL goes. PRODUCER returns and ACTOR comes forward.*]

ACTOR: And now, dear manageress, may we rehearse?

LEADING LADY: In a minute. I've remembered what I had to say to the author. (*To AUTHOR*) Yes. Your last scene, the one between the sailor and his sweetheart, as you call her, will never hold the house. In fact, the play ends with the seagull's death on her icefield.

ACTOR: Ah! *Your* death?

LEADING LADY: Yes, *my* death.

AUTHOR: But——

LEADING LADY: That's a most dramatic scene, full of imagination. Anything after it must be an anticlimax.

AUTHOR: But an ending on the icefield would be purely operatic.

LEADING LADY: Operatic? When *I* am on the stage?

AUTHOR: The movement of the play absolutely requires a return to everyday life.

LEADING LADY: Everyday life—with a hero who has children by a bird? Is that what you call everyday life?

AUTHOR: He leaves them behind him.

LEADING LADY: Not a bit of it; they fly away. I know your play better than you do yourself.

AUTHOR: Unless it returns from fantasy to reality, the whole fable is meaningless.

LEADING LADY: Now, darling, be reasonable. I know the stage. I know my public. They'll never even listen to your last scene.

AUTHOR: Forgive me—but why not?

LEADING LADY: Come, you know there's not an actress in the world less difficult than I am. But when I stage a play and act in it, you must see I'm bound to be on at the end. Else the audience just go away! Nobody can blame them—they just go away! Then what becomes of your scene?

AUTHOR: But I can hardly believe——

LEADING LADY: Only look at it from your own point of view as an imaginative dramatist! Think of changing from that icefield, absolutely eternal and deeply impressive, to your sailor's wretched little hut.

AUTHOR: You mean his cabin.

LEADING LADY: His cabin if you like. You must be practical too—think of the change of scenery required. Five minutes' wait at least. Five minutes of hammering behind and whispering in front—enough to ruin any piece!

AUTHOR: But the wait will last only thirty seconds.

LEADING LADY: Ask the designer. At lunch-time he was on the phone for half an hour about it. Now just be reasonable—and a little sympathetic; you can see I have my worries too.

[*The ACTOR comes over to join them.*]

ACTOR: So the last scene comes out?

LEADING LADY: We're just speaking of it now.

ACTOR: And is the second scene out too—the one where you never appear at all?

LEADING LADY: Now, my dear man, don't be sarcastic. I'm a good-natured woman—but please!

ACTOR: I only asked if the second scene was out—but apparently it's still in.

LEADING LADY: I leave that scene in for the present, though it's five minutes too long.

ACTOR: So part of it will be out?

AUTHOR: No, no, impossible!

LEADING LADY: Yes, we simply must cut it. I was coming to that.

ACTOR: Very well. Allow me!

[*ACTOR takes a typescript part from his pocket and hands it to her.*]

LEADING LADY: What does this mean?

ACTOR: By the time we open, my part will consist of forty lines. Genius is required to make anything of forty lines. I only possess talent. Good afternoon.

[*She drags him back.*]

LEADING LADY: No, no! Really, it's too much! Here you hand me your part as if I were nobody! I ask you—is that worthy of you? (*He smiles.*) If I *must* give in to you, I must! Do as you please; play your second scene uncut, keep your last scene too—and then see what you have to say to me after the first night!

ACTOR: Nothing but compliments, I hope.

[*He pockets his part again.*]

LEADING LADY: None of you think of me and what I go through! Twice already that man has raised his rent against me—and who pays? I ask you, who pays?

PRODUCER: Now may we perhaps get on?

LEADING LADY: Beginners, please, for the first act. Penguins on your cliffs!

[CHARACTER MAN and CHARACTER WOMAN mount two chairs in readiness to rehearse. Before they can begin, the MANAGER appears and comes to the LEADING LADY.]

MANAGER: Ever so sorry, dear, but I must have a word with you.

LEADING LADY: Well?

MANAGER: One word alone.

LEADING LADY: After rehearsal.

MANAGER: Now is the only moment—I've a most important decision to make, and it concerns you. Just spare me five minutes!

LEADING LADY: Very well, let's get it over. (*To the rest*) You can begin without me.

[LEADING LADY goes out with MANAGER.]

[CHARACTER MAN and CHARACTER WOMAN clamber off their chairs again.]

ACTOR: The woman's incredible! Because her lover sells tyres, she buys plays! She is allowed to shorten, lengthen, and rewrite them—and to alter scenes and characters! Does anybody see the connection between tyres and plays? Perhaps our author sees it. Take care, dear boy, or she'll end by playing your piece alone! No more penguins, no more sailor and his sweet-heart—nobody but my lady seagull, flapping wings of tulle all evening on your icefield!

ACTRESS: And I thought my poor little scene was the only one in danger !

ACTOR: My darling, all your poor little scenes are in danger. First because you're talented, then because she now begins to read the play. And in the play the sailor's sweetheart is as much a person as the sailor's bird.

PRODUCER: Penguins, please, for the first act !

ACTOR: All right. Go to it, penguins !

[The AUTHOR comes and seats himself at the PRODUCER's side. The CHARACTER MAN and CHARACTER WOMAN clamber on their chairs again.]

PRODUCER: Don't expect too much—this is the first time they've tried it with business.

[AUTHOR nods.]

CHARACTER MAN: We're here.

CHARACTER WOMAN: We're here.

CHARACTER MAN: But where's our bird-fancier ?

PRODUCER: Filming. Make a start, please. I'll read his lines when we come to them. Curtain up !

[CHARACTER MAN and CHARACTER WOMAN as penguins, waddle on their chairs and imitate the flapping of penguins before they speak. They try to accompany the text with similar gestures of comedy.]

CHARACTER MAN: Curtain up. Hum !

“ We of the frozen world, who beat our wings
Erect upon a green translucent shore,
In myriads move with many murmurings,
Tell us, ye Fates, whom are we waiting for ? ”

[Silence. The CHARACTER WOMAN has missed her cue.]

PRODUCER: Well, whom *are* we waiting for ?

CHARACTER WOMAN: Sorry, my fault.

“ For giants striding over darkened seas,
For creatures of the South, long-armed and
fair,
And gay and bounteous, bearing at their ease
A thousand blessings to our frosty lair ! ”

CHARACTER MAN:

“ Our bills incline to heaven as we greet
These humans with a dance of many feet.”

CHARACTER WOMAN:

“ And cries, O cries of wonderment arise
To shake our topmost pinnacles of ice ! ”

CHARACTER MAN: “ So now——”

PRODUCER: Stop. I saw no bills inclining to heaven. Lots of other business, but no bills.

CHARACTER MAN: We haven't got them yet.

CHARACTER WOMAN: No, ask *her* about the bills.

CHARACTER MAN: She'll hear enough about bills.

[*The AUTHOR has risen.*]

AUTHOR: While you are stopping, may I say a word? I know penguins often pass for comical birds. But the penguin need not be comic, any more than the eagle need be noble. Do you follow me?

CHARACTER MAN: Oh, certainly, but the public thinks of penguins like this—— (*He flaps expressively.*)

AUTHOR: Suppose we forget what the public thinks? The men and birds of the play are impelled towards one another by a strange affinity, because the same spirit inhabits them both. In the legend of the mermaid we have a similar idea. I am sure you see that.

CHARACTER MAN: Of course, of course.

AUTHOR: For instance, when the sailor has once lived the magical life of the North with his seagull bride, he can no longer bear to live with his own kind.

ACTOR: That's me.

AUTHOR: And the seagull, after once experiencing human love, leaves the icefields to flutter about inhabited places, till she is caught and caged. And it follows that all the birds in the play, penguins included, must suggest——
(*He pauses for a word.*)

ACTOR: Excuse me, old boy, that word "suggest" is always difficult. Let me try to help you out. (*To CHARACTER MAN and CHARACTER WOMAN*) In this first scene the author asks you not to waddle, and let your flappers rest, and play it all straight.

CHARACTER MAN: Oh, *straight*!

CHARACTER WOMAN: Why, of course!

PRODUCER: And now your last line of the first speech.

CHARACTER MAN: "Tell us, ye Fates, whom are we waiting for?"

CHARACTER WOMAN:

"For giants striding over darkened seas,
For creatures of the South——"

AUTHOR: Forgive me, that's much too *poetical*.

CHARACTER WOMAN: The lines sounded a bit poetical to me.

AUTHOR: I was rather speaking of the style of delivery.

CHARACTER WOMAN (*offended*): Oh, were you?

AUTHOR: I really beg your pardon. I didn't mean——

CHARACTER WOMAN (*more offended*): It doesn't matter, thank you.

PRODUCER: They've been told to play it straight.

CHARACTER MAN: And I've never been a penguin myself.

PRODUCER: Go on, please. Make it all much more restrained.

CHARACTER WOMAN:

“ Bearing at their ease

A thousand blessings to our frosty lair ! ”

CHARACTER MAN:

“ Our bills incline to heaven as we greet
These humans with a dance——”

But without our flappers we get nowhere at all.

CHARACTER WOMAN: Nowhere !

CHARACTER MAN: If the scene is to carry, we must *do* something.

AUTHOR: No, no, you must *be* something !

CHARACTER MAN: I happen to be an actor !

PRODUCER: We can't have disputes about it. I'll take the penguin scene myself, with you two alone. Ten o'clock to-morrow, please. This afternoon I want to go on to the seagull scene after the capture—the big scene in Act II. (*Moving furniture*) Excuse me, would you give me a hand ?

[*The PENGUINS clamber off their chairs.*]

CHARACTER MAN: What about our leading lady ?

PRODUCER: We'll have her part read for her. (*To ACTRESS*) If you would be so kind ?

ACTOR: Bravo !

PRODUCER: And if the author has no objection ?

AUTHOR: Oh, on the contrary !

PRODUCER: I want to get all the movements right in this scene. You'll need a script.

ACTRESS: No, thank you, I know the lines.

PRODUCER: Good. In position, please, inside your cage. Your wings folded. Stage direction is—what is it, please?

AUTHOR: "All the rest have their heads under their wings, but this one seems to question the falling dusk."

PRODUCER: Thank you. Now we can begin. Curtain up.

ACTRESS: "Foolish birds, poor creatures who can only rest in darkness! Twittering in your cages, fretting yourselves against the bars, trembling when a human step goes by! Hearts always beating, beating in fear, because of the bars that surround you. But for me this cage is freedom! At last the great emptiness of sky no longer tortures me! I came here of my own will. I had the longing to know, once more, the warmth of earthly creatures! I came and fluttered round this prison-house, fluttered until a warm hand closed on me and thrust me in."

[The AUTHOR makes an involuntary gesture, and she stops.]

Is it wrong?

AUTHOR: No, for the first time it's right!

PRODUCER: Straight ahead, please.

ACTRESS: "Until a warm hand closed on me and thrust me in. Here comes the man whose hand it was—I know his step already!"

[COMEDIAN has just entered.]

COMEDIAN (*repeating the cue*): "I know his step"—that's me, the bird-fancier!

ACTOR: Ha! Our comedian in the nick of time!

COMEDIAN (*preparing to rehearse*): But who have we here? Lady Seagull not in the nest?

PRODUCER (*briefly*): Keeping a business appointment.

COMEDIAN: Best idea she's had this week. Give me the cue again, dear.

ACTRESS: "I know his step already."

COMEDIAN: "Never fear, my little ones"—that right? "Never fear, my little ones. To-night will give you back everything I stole from you. Heads under wings, you can dream of the skies again."

PRODUCER (*correcting him*): The sky, it says here.

COMEDIAN: Sorry, but I thought skies sounded better.

AUTHOR: He's perfectly right. (*To COMEDIAN*) Thank you. Skies is better.

COMEDIAN: You're welcome. Wrote a play myself once. (*To PRODUCER*) Sorry, but what comes next?

PRODUCER: You close the shutters of your bird-shop.

COMEDIAN (*making a pencil note on script*): Close shutters. Hinges or rollers?

PRODUCER: Double hinges. One each side.

COMEDIAN (*making movements*): Here goes, then.

PRODUCER: Second shutter closes—slight bang. Cue for sailor's entrance.

ACTOR (*making note in turn*): Slight bang. That's me.

[*He makes his entrance and passes slowly in front of the chair marking the bird-shop. The COMEDIAN watches and lets him pass.*]

No, old boy. This is where you clap me on the shoulder.

COMEDIAN: Sorry, I forgot. Been filming all day.

ACTOR: Could we do that bit again?

COMEDIAN: Yes, old man. Make your entrance.

[ACTOR enters as before, but this time is clapped on the shoulder.

PRODUCER (*prompting*): "Well, sailor."

COMEDIAN: "Well, sailor, still in dreamland, eh? Still mourning for your white-haired bride?"

PRODUCER: White-feathered, please.

AUTHOR: This time I also prefer the original.

COMEDIAN: "Still mourning for your white-feathered bride, still looking for your babies with the rosy beaks?"

[The ACTOR comes in with sudden power and conviction.

ACTOR: "Mine are no dreams! For two summers and two winters, in the hut where my shipmates had left me, we lay together on our bed of eiderdown. By a miracle she was woman for bodily pleasure, and bird for the flights of her restless spirit! When after the second winter came the spring, one morning I saw her go with our children to the point of the headland. I heard her say to them, 'Remember you belong to the race of birds, the sons of the wind!' And then their arms became wings, their bodies suddenly were covered with feathers, and all of them together flew into the mist, uttering harsh cries!"

AUTHOR (*under his breath*): Excellent!

COMEDIAN: "One of those gulls came circling round my bird-shop this very morning. A her she was by the look of her, and you could almost have said she wanted to be snared. I caught her in one hand, and put her in the cage behind these shutters. You can see her for yourself."

ACTOR: Yes, show her to me!

[*The COMEDIAN makes a movement of opening shutters.*

It is she !

[*The ACTRESS, making an entrance in the background, opens her arms to him.*

ACTRESS: "Johann ! My Johann !"

ACTOR: "Open the cage !"

[*COMEDIAN makes the movement of opening, and ACTRESS comes forward.*

ACTRESS: "Ah, how long I have been looking for you ! I flew back there to the mountains, to our hut where the nights were always starry. I circled a hundred times around it. I followed all the ships that sailed southward. Above their masts, along their foaming wake, I cried to you, 'Johann, forgive me that I flew away, forgive me that the powers of air could ever draw me upward from the earth I shared with you !' Over cliffs and sands I flew, and cried, 'Johann, it is for your sake I am here ! I cannot live any more with my own kind ! My world of the air stifles me ! I can only breathe in a man's arms !'"

[*She falls into the arms of the ACTOR.*

CHARACTER MAN: Excuse me, but is this where we awaken ?

PRODUCER: First they hold the embrace, then you move. Hold it, please.

[*The CHARACTER MAN and CHARACTER WOMAN clamber into position again, in readiness for awakening. The ACTOR and ACTRESS remain locked in their embrace. The LEADING LADY suddenly bursts upon the scene.*

LEADING LADY: What is this ? How dare you all—how dare you ?

PRODUCER: You wanted the rehearsal to go on.

LEADING LADY: Not for *my* scenes—not with this woman in my part !

PRODUCER: As time was so valuable, I asked her as your understudy to read it.

LEADING LADY: Oh, anything you can do to vex and humiliate me you will do—every one of you! Here am I, an artist persecuted by moneymakers, dragged from my own stage to sign a cheating contract—and what do you all say of me when my back is turned? Well, you can say it now to my face! Tell me I give nobody a chance on the stage beside me! Tell me I grab and murder every part! Tell me I ruin every play I touch!

AUTHOR: No, no, please, please, not that!

ACTOR (*interposing with quiet authority*): Listen, dear. One drama at a time's enough, that is the one we're rehearsing. However big a part you may have in another, we happen to have studied this one first.

LEADING LADY (*hysterical*): Very well, we'll rehearse! You're right—my troubles are my own! Where are we in the play?

PRODUCER: The seagull's in the sailor's arms.

[ACTOR *opens his arms to receive* LEADING LADY.

ACTOR: And here you are.

PRODUCER: Birds ready, please.

[CHARACTER MAN and CHARACTER WOMAN *get ready again*.

LEADING LADY: Give me my last sentence but one.

PRODUCER: "My world of the air stifles me."

LEADING LADY (*with sentimental emphasis*): "My world of the air—my world of the air stifles me. I can only——"

AUTHOR: Excuse me, everything depends on the tone at this moment. It should be *less* emphatic, more deeply emotional.

LEADING LADY: I'm feeling for words; the rest will come. (*To ACTOR*) *You* know my emotional range.

ACTOR: Indeed I do.

LEADING LADY: When once I begin weeping on the stage, I can never stop—I'm shaken through and through with sobbing! But not at rehearsal, of course—not while one's feeling for words. Now let us get on. Give me my last cue before the embrace.

PRODUCER: "In a man's arms."

LEADING LADY (*with emphasis as before*): "I can only breathe in a man's arms."

[*She falls heavily into the ACTOR's arms.*]

ACTOR: Steady, dear. I've got to breathe too.

[*They remain entwined.*]

PRODUCER: And now the birds awaken.

LEADING LADY (*disengaging herself*): What was that you said?

PRODUCER: The birds awaken, led by penguins. Just as you embrace.

LEADING LADY: Is that in the play?

PRODUCER: It's in the script.

LEADING LADY: No, no, that must be a mistake!

AUTHOR: I don't see why.

LEADING LADY: If you wake them up I can't play the scene! I simply can't play it! Nobody could! This is a love-scene, and there the creatures stand behind us flapping!

ACTOR: They don't disturb *me*.

LEADING LADY: Well, they do *me*. And the audience too—I'm sure of it!

CHARACTER MAN: May I suggest something? What if only one of us woke up?

LEADING LADY: Now you're trying to be funny !

CHARACTER MAN: No, I only hoped *I* might be the one.

ACTOR (*sotto voce*): That's enough, you old rascal.

LEADING LADY: There, I make one suggestion, and you all laugh at me !

PRODUCER (*pencil in hand*): So the birds are not to waken ?

LEADING LADY (*after an instant*): Certainly not ! Let them go on sleeping.

PRODUCER (*drily*): Make a note, please, penguins. Go on sleeping.

AUTHOR: But that's terrible !

LEADING LADY: What is terrible ?

AUTHOR: What you are doing—torturing the play out of knowledge ! Little by little, everything vanishing but yourself ! Twisting, choking, *destroying—that is what I call terrible !*

LEADING LADY: Listen to him ! Just what I told you ! What all of you say behind my back, he tells me to my face ! An author ! An author *I* put before the public ! A poet no management would look at ! An author who would never have had a play performed, never in this world, unless I had bought it from him !

AUTHOR: If that's how you feel——

[*General protest and uproar.*]

PRODUCER: As producer, I do beg of you——

ACTOR: My darling, you can't say those things !

LEADING LADY: Can't I ? You dare stop me !

CHARACTER MAN: Scandalous, I call it !

CHARACTER WOMAN: Who started it but herself ?

LEADING LADY: He shall apologise !

AUTHOR: I've nothing more to say, nothing whatever !

[*Sudden silence. The MANAGER with old-world stage-courtesy is showing the FILM VICE-PRESIDENT out, across the stage.*

MANAGER: And here you see the present company of my theatre at work.—Our distinguished visitor, Vice-President of the Globe Film Corporation.

[*The company compose themselves.*

VICE-PRESIDENT: Pleased to meet you all. Going strong, I see.

MANAGER: It's a very powerful scene.

VICE-PRESIDENT: This the play you told me of, about the bird ?

MANAGER: Yes. Wonderful piece of work.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Must look in and see it some time.

MANAGER: Drop in any evening, any evening. Always welcome.

VICE-PRESIDENT: So long, all.

[*He goes off as though wasted from the scene by the MANAGER.*

LEADING LADY: He *shall* apologise !

ACTOR: Do you know, the strange thing about our manager is that he loves the theatre. He'll sell it—but he loves it !

LEADING LADY: Wait until he sells it over your head !

ACTOR: I always do wait till then.

[PROPERTY MAN, *amiably drunk, staggers in with the figure of the poet and comes to LEADING LADY.*

PROPERTY MAN: See, mum, the poet's mended !

LEADING LADY: What ?

PROPERTY MAN (*displaying his handiwork*): The poet, mum—he's mended!

LEADING LADY: Take this drunken creature away! Take him away!

[PROPERTY MAN *smiles at her*.

Oh! Oh!

[*She goes out.*

PRODUCER: Wait, all the company, please. Rehearsal to-morrow at ten-thirty.

[*The company begin to disperse.*

CHARACTER MAN: She'll go on with it.

CHARACTER WOMAN: Yes, trust her for that!

[*They go out together.*

PRODUCER: You can switch out, Electrics.

ELECTRICIAN: Very good, sir.

AUTHOR (*to ACTRESS*): Do we dine together?

ACTRESS: That's for you to say.

[*They go out together.*

COMEDIAN: So long. I'm filming to-morrow.

PRODUCER: Films are—— So long!

[COMEDIAN *goes*. PROPERTY MAN *comes to* ACTOR.

PROPERTY MAN: Look, sir, I've mended the poet!

ACTOR: Yes, old man, and you're pleased with your day's work. I wish all of us were in your shoes! Here, go and have another drink. You'll be more pleased!

[ACTOR *goes*, and PROPERTY MAN *shuffles after him*.

PRODUCER, *left alone on the stage*, picks up his papers and follows, switching out the lights.

INTERLUDE

*between Scene I and Scene II**(may be omitted if desired)*

While the curtain is down, a gramophone reproduces the following recorded fragments of conversation in a dressing-room corridor, during the visit of members of the audience after the first night.

VOICES: Now, my sweet, we simply *must* be going. . . . Thank you a thousand times, dear, you were *lovely*. . . . Marvellous, your death scene . . . and such *flowers*. . . . Tony *wept* with laughing at the penguins. . . . *Great* success. I said so from the first, dear. . . . Original . . . most *glacial*, your icefield. . . . Really made me *shiver* . . . but the seagull . . . Yes, the girl was passable, but *you*, dear . . . *Darling*, what an evening . . . they adored you. . . . *Too*, too entrancing. . . . Let me, *let* me thank you. . . . *What* a proud man you must be to own her. . . . *Did* I thank you for that tip about Combustions? . . . Yes, I bought a thousand, now they're *soaring*. . . . How you must be *tired*, my darling. . . . Triumph. . . . Positively *shattering* . . . you heard us. . . . Now, my sweet, we *simply* must be going. . . . *Thousand* times, dear . . . icefield . . . seagull . . . icefield . . . flowers . . . penguins . . . *great* success . . . adored you. . . .

[The voices fade away in repetitions.]

SCENE II

Stage of the same theatre a fortnight later.

ELECTRICIAN *seated on a snow-white piece of scenery reading a newspaper. Enter PROPERTY MAN, sober.*

PROPERTY MAN: How's the icefield this morning, Electrics? Bearin' nicely?

ELECTRICIAN: Bearin'? I should say so. Biggest frost ever known.

PROPERTY MAN: That paper got anything about us?

ELECTRICIAN: You bet it has! Listen to this. (*Reads*) "We confess that the seagull, both by her vocal and physical amplitude, suggested at first a species unknown in this or any other climate."

PROPERTY MAN: Oho!

ELECTRICIAN: "But as the evening wore on (and we use the words advisedly) we were reluctantly compelled to accept the existence of such a giantess of the feathered world."

PROPERTY MAN (*taking paper from him*): "A bird most solidly caparisoned with wings, and lacking span and substance only in the dramatic sense."

ELECTRICIAN: Made me laugh. I was called for rehearsal, were you?

PROPERTY MAN: Yes. Always a bad sign when they rehearse the morning after.

ELECTRICIAN (*imitating the LEADING LADY*): Ow, Johann, Johann!

PROPERTY MAN: Watch out, here comes a king penguin.

ELECTRICIAN: Hide the paper, quick! (*As AUTHOR enters*) Morning, sir.

[AUTHOR *seats himself in corner of stage. Stage hands go off. ACTOR enters, comes to AUTHOR, shakes his hand as though in sympathy for a bereavement.*

ACTOR: My dear fellow!

AUTHOR: Last night I had no chance to thank you properly. You did everything that could be done—you and your sweetheart.

ACTOR: Yes, the girl was good; she surprised me more than once.

AUTHOR: But as for the play as a whole——

ACTOR: Some people appreciate it all the same.

AUTHOR: Do you really think that possible?

ACTOR: A friend said to me it was a work of feeling and imagination, played by a woman with neither.

AUTHOR: Still, her elocution was perfect.

ACTOR: In a night or two we shall all be elocuting beautifully. Nothing so catching in the theatre, not even 'flu.

AUTHOR: Do you think, with such a Press, we have a chance?

ACTOR: Might perhaps do a month.

AUTHOR: That wouldn't be so disastrous.

ACTOR: Not so brilliant either. We've rehearsed as long as that.

AUTHOR: Up to the end of Act II I was blind enough to believe it could be a success.

ACTOR: I was doubtful from the beginning. Before she came on I saw her in the wings from the tail of my eye and thought, "Never will they stand for that seagull!" Now, if the little girl had played the part we might have run six months.

AUTHOR: The luck of the theatre, I suppose!

ACTOR: Yes, now we're gamblers on the morning after—half inclined to swear off cards for ever!

[MANAGER *enters*.

MANAGER: Well, is our author satisfied?

AUTHOR: The Press seems none too good.

MANAGER: What could you expect? That seagull was a bird they could hardly miss!

ACTOR: No, the feathers were bound to fly this morning.

MANAGER: That's not the worst. Wait for the evening papers and the weeklies, who have time to take a proper aim!

ACTOR: I hate to know the shooting season will continue.

[LEADING LADY *enters*.

MANAGER: Well, my heroine, what do you think of your Press?

LEADING LADY: You know I never read notices. I make it a positive rule.

MANAGER: You might have made a positive exception this time.

LEADING LADY: But I hear they've been pretty brutal.

MANAGER: Absolutely rabid.

LEADING LADY: Well, I'm not like some other leading ladies. I neither sleep with the critics nor ask them to dinner.

MANAGER: Good. Our lady gull can still peck! Now you had better come to my office, to decide what steps are necessary.

LEADING LADY: Steps?

MANAGER: The house looks like being as empty as your icefield.

AUTHOR: Then have you no bookings?

MANAGER: Not what you might call a rush.

LEADING LADY: We must give them time. Some plays start with a third capacity, some a tenth, some a twentieth.

AUTHOR: A twentieth—capacity?

ACTOR: Some plays also finish there.

MANAGER (*about to go*): And, by the way, don't miss the *Shooting World* next week. It should be quite a special number—all those sea-birds must have got them thoroughly excited. I look forward to your first good notice.

LEADING LADY: Oh, I'm sick of your bad jokes!

MANAGER: Read *Our Feathered Friends* as well!

[MANAGER *laughs and goes*.

AUTHOR: No bookings! But what are we to do?

LEADING LADY: If you still mean to keep that ending, of course we can give up hope at once. Everyone came to me afterwards and said, "Do get him to cut out that last scene!"

AUTHOR: Those who came to me said—but no matter!

LEADING LADY: Surely you felt the coldness of the house at the end?

AUTHOR: I felt it earlier, on the icefield.

LEADING LADY: You might leave that sort of remark to the critics!

AUTHOR: The seagull's death-scene failed completely.

LEADING LADY: And of course that was *my* fault! It never occurs to you that the scene itself may have been weak and sketchy? I must tell you lots of other people think so!

AUTHOR: If the scene is so bad, why do you wish it to be the ending of the play?

LEADING LADY: Because as artist I can build upon it. If you had agreed to write it up a little, as I asked you weeks ago, I could have done something really brilliant for you. But, instead, you preferred to risk the success of the whole play so as to please a girl who wanted to be in the final scene herself!

AUTHOR (*astounded*): Such a thought never entered my head !

LEADING LADY: Oh, I know my authors—I know how dangerous their little weaknesses can be ! I agree it's hard to refuse a girl who longs to shine. Especially when she happens to be—well, shall we say a friend ?

AUTHOR: Infamous !

LEADING LADY: A friend with whom one is seen a good deal. But it just happens that such little favours ruin plays—it just happens they betray fellow-artists ! There ! You will forgive me, it had to be said !

AUTHOR (*raging*): You ! *You* talk of favours and the ruin of plays and the betrayal of artists ! *You* ! Do you know *nothing* of what happened on this stage last night ?

LEADING LADY: I know well enough, and I'm not afraid of facing facts ! You'll see what business we do with your precious masterpiece ! Not twenty, not fifteen a night, with a play that cost me a thousand for scenery and costumes alone !

[*The young ACTRESS has just entered. The ACTOR interposes tactfully.*

(*As she passes the ACTRESS*) So this is the young lady who pleases the Press. I only hope *she* is satisfied !

[LEADING LADY *goes out.*

ACTOR: Congratulations, young lady.

AUTHOR: Yes, indeed !

ACTRESS: But the play, the play !

ACTOR: Ask the author to write you another.

ACTRESS: I only want to be in this one !

AUTHOR: This one is a disaster ! Why shouldn't it come off at once ?

ACTOR: Ask your leading lady, dear boy. She means to appear in it, and a car with an out-size in tyres will be waiting for her every night.

[PRODUCER enters with two books of tickets and a rubber stamp.

PRODUCER: Morning, everybody. Rehearsal in ten minutes, please.

ACTOR: Just time for my cup of coffee. (*Exit.*)

AUTHOR: Rehearsal—what a mockery!

PRODUCER (*calling*): Props! Electrics! On the stage, please!

[PROPERTY MAN and ELECTRICIAN come on.

ACTRESS: Rehearsal—that will help us to forget!

PROPERTY MAN: Yes, sir?

ELECTRICIAN: Yes, sir?

[PRODUCER hands them tickets.

PRODUCER: Seats for to-night and to-morrow. Make sure they're used.

PROPERTY MAN (*pocketing tickets*): Thank you, sir.

ELECTRICIAN (*pocketing tickets*): Much obliged, sir.

PRODUCER: No sarcasm required from either of you.

ELECTRICIAN: No, sir.

PROPERTY MAN: No, sir.

[*They go out. PRODUCER continues stamping tickets. AUTHOR has joined ACTRESS.*

ACTRESS: Only tell me the last scene is still in!

AUTHOR: She called the rehearsal to cut it, but now she knows I refuse.

ACTRESS: I'm not asking on my own account.

AUTHOR: You needn't tell me that.

ACTRESS: My poor darling, did you manage to sleep at all when the ordeal was over?

AUTHOR: I must have slept, for I remember dreaming of an enormous seagull that came pecking at my vitals.

ACTRESS: What you must have suffered!

AUTHOR: Even more than the audience, and that says much. I think among failures this one should really take first prize.

ACTRESS: If that woman really knew what she had done, she would kill herself.

AUTHOR: Perhaps that needs imagination.

ACTRESS: I could do it for far less!

AUTHOR: But perhaps we exaggerate. What is theatre but painted canvas—dusty canvas at that? If it were to vanish to-morrow, would the face of the world really be changed?

ACTRESS: It would be changed for us. We could never live in a world without it.

[*Silence, broken by the percussions of the PRODUCER's stamp.*]

AUTHOR: If one could be defeated rather more nobly—not like this! Not by things and people one despises—not by greed and vanity and emptiness! Now, with stage and screen together, opportunity should be richer than ever before! The machine itself is a marvel; the will to control it is in all of us; but stage and screen together are exploited, cheapened, and degraded until no integrity is safe!

ACTRESS: We are safe; you are safe. Nothing can touch the work you have written.

[*PRODUCER continues stamping tickets. Then MANAGER enters with VICE-PRESIDENT.*]

MANAGER: Ah, fortunately here he is! Our author—the Vice-President of the Globe Film Corporation.

AUTHOR (*rising*): How do you do?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Proud to meet you, sir. (*Shaking his hand vigorously.*) My congratulations, sir, on your great success last night.

AUTHOR: I beg your pardon?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Remarkable! Overwhelming!

MANAGER: Prodigious!

VICE-PRESIDENT: *And* well deserved, not a doubt of it.

AUTHOR: Then you have not seen my play?

VICE-PRESIDENT: I look forward to that pleasure.

AUTHOR: May I ask, have you read the notices?

MANAGER: Ahem! The Vice-President looked at some of them.

VICE-PRESIDENT: What I have read, sir, convinces me that, whatever the shortcomings of the performance, your drama is a great piece of imaginative work.

AUTHOR: I am glad anyone should take that view, but——

VICE-PRESIDENT: What is more, sir, I see in it a motion-picture subject of the first class. *If* properly handled.

MANAGER: Quite so. *If* properly handled.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Yes, sir. When I read of those birds of the Arctic regions treated with such poetic grandeur—when I think of those white trackless wastes where the foot of man has never trod—not even a cameraman—then I say to myself, What a supreme combination of nature film and human story!

AUTHOR: In a sense I agree with you, but my play is rather specially imagined for the theatre.

VICE-PRESIDENT: No one, sir, respects and honours the theatre more than I do. No one knows better what the motion-picture industry owes to that historic institution.

[He makes a bow to the MANAGER, who returns it ceremoniously.]

But for this particular subject your medium is the screen.

AUTHOR: I am rather taken aback by such a thought.

VICE-PRESIDENT: The screen needs you, sir. It needs writers of your eminence and imagination. It needs the creative sweep that only men like you can command.

MANAGER: My very words !

VICE-PRESIDENT: That, sir, is why you see me here to-day.

AUTHOR: May I ask, would the filming of my play involve the present cast ?

[MANAGER and VICE-PRESIDENT exchange glances.]

VICE-PRESIDENT: No, sir. If my Corporation has the honour of making the picture, it will place at your disposal the finest acting material available.

AUTHOR *(with alacrity)*: In that case, may I introduce you to the lady who plays the sailor's sweetheart in the play ?

[He presents the ACTRESS. FILM VICE-PRESIDENT and MANAGER exchange glances again.]

VICE-PRESIDENT: So this is the talented young lady ?

[MANAGER nods.]

AUTHOR: I see you must have read the notices of her performance?

VICE-PRESIDENT (*with affected indifference, to MANAGER*): Did we read them? Let me see.

MANAGER (*in the same tone*): Yes, yes, I think so.

ACTRESS: But, really, I hardly do anything in the play!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Hum! We might possibly put that right.

MANAGER: Possibly, possibly.

VICE-PRESIDENT: But our first business, of course, is to agree terms with the author.

AUTHOR: Terms? But I really have not the slightest notion—

MANAGER (*smoothly*): Then, my dear author, why not let *me* represent you?

AUTHOR: I seem to recall some clause in my contract about motion-picture rights.

MANAGER: Exactly. The management receives a half-share.

AUTHOR: The management?

MANAGER: In this case myself. So that, you see, our interests are identical.

AUTHOR: At least they are equal. Then had you any proposal actually in mind?

[MANAGER and FILM VICE-PRESIDENT *exchange glances again*.

MANAGER: I thought of some round figure—say ten thousand?

AUTHOR (*involuntarily*): Oh!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Too round for me.

MANAGER: Then say five thousand? Three thousand?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Two thousand—subject to my board's approval.

MANAGER: And what does our author say?

AUTHOR: It seems to me a very large sum.

MANAGER: Not for such a play as yours.

ACTRESS: Oh, no! No!

VICE-PRESIDENT: If this young lady says so, the offer's firm.

MANAGER: Then we might draft a contract.

[LEADING LADY *has just entered*.

LEADING LADY: Contract? What contract?

MANAGER: My darling, you'll be glad to know our author's motion-picture rights are sold.

LEADING LADY: What, in my play?

MANAGER: In *his* play.

LEADING LADY: But it was I who made the play what it is! (*To ACTOR*) Did I not?

ACTOR: You certainly did your best.

MANAGER: Come, this is the fortune of war. Let us congratulate the author and ourselves.

LEADING LADY: When do we start making the picture?

MANAGER: Ahem! I'm afraid, my darling, you don't start making it.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Sorry, madam, that is so.

LEADING LADY: I don't play the seagull in my own story?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Not in *our* story.

LEADING LADY: Very well, that settles it! Keep your play and your rights—you'll have no more advertisement from me! As far as I'm concerned, there is no play any more! This production's over! Dead and done with! Take down the bills—I give no performance to-night! Do you hear me—no performance!

MANAGER: That would be breach of contract.

LEADING LADY: I don't care what it is—this play comes off! And after one night's run! That will make you think before you buy and sell the screen rights! One night's run—then no performance! No performance!

[LEADING LADY *walks out*.

MANAGER: *She* gave no performance, anyway.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Gentlemen, my Corporation will think again.

MANAGER: No, I beg you—

VICE-PRESIDENT: My Corporation buys no screen rights to stage failures.

MANAGER: I assure you we can persuade her—

AUTHOR (*violently*): No, let her go!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Your author himself is through with her!

MANAGER: But the story—think of the story—

VICE-PRESIDENT: Good afternoon!

[*He is about to go, the MANAGER desperately trying to drag him back, when the PRODUCER interposes.*

PRODUCER: Excuse me, would you carry on your discussion somewhere else? We have a rehearsal on this stage.

MANAGER: Rehearsal?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Rehearsal?

PRODUCER: I'm producer, and responsible. This show goes on to-night.

ACTOR: Good! good!

MANAGER: To-night? But how—?

PRODUCER: Understudies, please. Sailor's sweetheart takes the seagull. Would you give us the stage, please? All stand by for icefield scene. Props! Electrics!

PROPERTY MAN: Ready, sir !

ELECTRICIAN: Ready, sir !

VICE-PRESIDENT: This is a new one on me !

MANAGER: And on me !

PRODUCER: Seagull, please ! Stage direction:
" On the icefield, looking into distance."

[ACTRESS *seats herself*.

ACTRESS: " I see no horizon any longer. Far away in a jagged circle stood the ice-floes, frozen in some ancient leap against the sky. But now nearer, always nearer, creeps a mist."

PRODUCER: Now bring the range of vision closer if you can.

ACTRESS: " My world draws in upon itself, this white desert growing narrower, the heavy air more impenetrable to my wings. So mankind must live, and I as one of them. So mankind must love, knowing their own utter solitude. So mankind must die, seeing the horizon vanish even as they strain their eyes to look beyond. . . ."

[*All on the stage listen, motionless.*

CURTAIN

PART II

SCENE I

Three months later, in the board-room of the Globe Film Corporation Building.

AUTHOR *and* ACTRESS *alone, waiting.* FILM VICE-PRESIDENT *enters and greets them heartily.*

VICE-PRESIDENT: Welcome! Welcome to the board-room of the Globe Film Corporation! Play still going strong?

AUTHOR: Yes, indeed.

ACTRESS: Our hundredth performance to-night.

VICE-PRESIDENT: So they tell me. Our President will be with us directly. Pardon me. I'll tell him you're here.

[He goes into an inner office.]

ACTRESS: This ought to be a big experience for us both.

AUTHOR: I even feel the sense of entering another world.

ACTRESS: No wonder, with that lift and those page girls.

AUTHOR: And this board-room!

ACTRESS: They are efficient, you must grant them that.

AUTHOR: Queer, this separation of the business and producing branches. Here the palatial offices—and somewhere miles away the sheds they call studios.

ACTRESS: It's just like the theatre, really. In front rather showy, behind rather sordid.

AUTHOR: How utterly a stranger I should feel if you were not here with me!

ACTRESS: I shall feel it, even if they offer me the lead in your picture.

AUTHOR: But that's why you're here!

ACTRESS: I'm here for your sake, too.

AUTHOR: This morning early, watching you as you lay asleep, I was thinking to myself: "There lies your conscience! When her lids open you know the truth!"

ACTRESS: Then may your conscience never trouble you too much! But I'm proud you should still think of me so, since I became a leading lady.

AUTHOR: Oh, *your* success is genuine enough!

ACTRESS: All success is more or less a racket. Your first Lady Seagull was planted on her icefield by a tyre merchant, your second by a film company that had bought a play and refused to let it be a failure.

AUTHOR: There's not the least comparison between you! I won't have you pretend there is!

ACTRESS: Very well then, blessings on the good author who makes it all possible!

AUTHOR: Just suppose, in this tower of steel and concrete, we kissed each other?

ACTRESS: You live by having lovely ideas. (*She kisses him.*) But take care!

AUTHOR (*holding her*): Am I risking my reputation as an author?

ACTRESS: Certainly you are. They could never believe the famous man is twice as young as his age—or twice as foolish as his actress friend.

AUTHOR: One thing I notice—the screen is not quite like the stage. There's no immediate entry on an embrace.

ACTRESS: There is if you wait long enough (*Releasing herself*) I said take care!

[*A small procession enters from the PRESIDENT'S room. First the elderly PRESIDENT of the Corporation*

himself, walking with an air of authority. Next the VICE-PRESIDENT, next TWO BOARD MEMBERS coming side by side. Then the FILM DIRECTOR, and last the CONTINUITY WRITER with an armful of manuscripts.

VICE-PRESIDENT (*hurrying forward to make introductions*): Our author and our leading lady! Meet our President! Two members of our board. The Director of this picture. Hum! A writer on the script.

[*Handshakes and bows. The PRESIDENT seats himself.*]

PRESIDENT: Our guests will honour us by joining our session. (*All sit.*) First we congratulate them on the success of this remarkable stage play. I am proud that my Corporation saved a fine work which was about to perish. Let us hope the picture we are now to make will prove itself equally worthy of survival.

AUTHOR: Thank you.

PRESIDENT: We now have to consider the treatment of this picture. Since our last session we have acquired, from a company in liquidation, a number of reels of film entitled *Wild Life in the Arctic*. (*At a movement from the AUTHOR*) This, let me say, is not the title of the picture—nor is it a comment on the subject-matter of the stage play. It is felt, however, that the use of these reels will both simplify and beautify the making of the picture as we see it. Does that meet the wishes of the board?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Certainly.

1ST BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

2ND BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

AUTHOR: But excuse me, would not the fusion of reality and symbolism be rather disturbing? The nature-film, for instance, might show forms of life that had no bearing on the action.

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PRESIDENT: You mean whales?

AUTHOR: I had not thought of any one species.

PRESIDENT: It occurred to me at once. In fact, on viewing the nature-picture I said at once, "Too many whales."

VICE-PRESIDENT: With your permission, sir, we can make it an executive instruction to cut out whales.

FILM DIRECTOR: But excuse me, Mr. President, the ship in the story is a whaling-ship.

PRESIDENT: Which story?

FILM DIRECTOR: The O.K. treatment. It's a fine old ship, full-rigged. Must have cost money to charter.

PRESIDENT: I think, even if we cut the whales, we should keep the ship. The public knows that fishermen can be unsuccessful.

BOARD MEMBERS: Ha, ha!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Whaling-ship in.

1ST BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

2ND BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

FILM DIRECTOR: I don't want any whale close-ups, Mr. President, but I would like a distant spout or two, just as effect.

PRESIDENT: Looks good to me. What does the author say?

AUTHOR: May I ask if there are any penguins in your picture?

FILM DIRECTOR: Drove of 'em—just drove. Camera seems to knock 'em over.

AUTHOR: But, excuse me, those must be real penguins you are speaking of.

PRESIDENT: Why, certainly they are real!

FILM DIRECTOR: Lots of polar bears, too.

AUTHOR (*alarmed*): Bears?

PRESIDENT: I was coming to that. When I saw the nature-picture I said at once, "Too many bears."

VICE-PRESIDENT: Three different cameramen thought so too.

PRESIDENT: Is that why the company's in liquidation?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Ha, ha !

1ST BOARD MEMBER: Ha, ha !

2ND BOARD MEMBER: Ha, ha !

PRESIDENT: But the public expect polar bears. They *must* be in this picture.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Polar bears in.

1ST BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

2ND BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

FILM DIRECTOR: Bears in. The only other animal query is the seals.

PRESIDENT: Not performing seals of course?

FILM DIRECTOR: No, sir, they do not perform.

PRESIDENT: We shall agree that in limited numbers they also are essential.

AUTHOR: But may I please——

PRESIDENT: Excuse me, we are now filling in the artistic background of the picture. Your help will be valued when we come to the story. We now continue with the landscape scenes.

FILM DIRECTOR: There isn't much land in the nature film, not after leaving Spitzbergen harbour.

PRESIDENT: Plenty of sea, I suppose?

FILM DIRECTOR: Oh, plenty. Icebergs and all.

PRESIDENT: The first President of our organisation used to say, "Never forget Nature or she may forget you." We must select the best nature-studies this Arctic picture has to give.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Stress Nature.

1ST BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

2ND BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

VICE-PRESIDENT: That is an executive instruction.

FILM DIRECTOR: Stress Nature.

[All make notes.]

PRESIDENT: And now we come to the story—last but not least, Mr. Author. I am glad to say your story has been honoured by absolutely special treatment. It has been handed over to six of the ablest and most highly paid writers in this industry, *each working separately upon it.*

AUTHOR (*staggered*): Did you say six?

PRESIDENT: We decided to have not less than that number of treatments from separate *imaginative* minds, each of them unaware of the task entrusted to the others. That, I may say, is the highest compliment that can be paid to any picture subject.

AUTHOR: Indeed?

PRESIDENT: Where are the six versions?

CONTINUITY WRITER: Here, sir.

PRESIDENT: And the O.K. treatment eventually prepared by yourself?

CONTINUITY WRITER: Here, sir.

[He hands it to the PRESIDENT, who weighs it in his hand.]

PRESIDENT: Feels to me too long. How much of this is for the cutting-room floor, eh?

CONTINUITY WRITER: You know best about that, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT (*pleased*): And you know the right answer, eh? (*To AUTHOR*) I take a personal part in the production of every picture, Mr. Author.

AUTHOR (*watching the MS. as though fascinated*): May I perhaps glance at the manuscript?

PRESIDENT (*handing it to him*): Why, certainly you may.

AUTHOR: I see it is typed in parallel columns?

PRESIDENT: We are proud of our system, which no other company has evolved. The selected episode of each version is marked by a cross and finally included in the O.K. column.

AUTHOR (*examining the document, with relief*): Ah, I see you include dialogue from the play as well?

PRESIDENT: Have we any dialogue from the play, Mr. Director?

FILM DIRECTOR: Those are the queries, I expect.

PRESIDENT (*taking back the copy*): Ah, yes, the queries. For instance, a passage here: "Two summers and two winters we lay together on our bed of eiderdown." That is the sailor speaking, I believe.

AUTHOR: Yes, the sailor.

PRESIDENT: This passage raises considerable doubts in our minds. May we take it the speech relates to a bird?

AUTHOR: To the seagull. If you read on——

PRESIDENT: One thing at a time, please. What exactly happened between your sailor and this bird?

AUTHOR: I suppose what usually happens between lovers.

[*All the others exchange glances.*]

PRESIDENT: Then we may place a pictorial construction on the bed?

AUTHOR: You mean show it? Actually there in the North?

PRESIDENT: The story part of our picture will be made in our studios.

AUTHOR: Then I think the allusion to the bed should remain a purely poetic image.

ACTRESS: Forgive me, but I do so entirely agree.

PRESIDENT: With all respect to the occupants of this bed, I beg to differ. In my opinion this is one of the author's most *imaginative* conceptions.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Hear, hear.

AUTHOR: Only in words! Not if you show it!

PRESIDENT: The stage perhaps can pass it by in words. But the screen must show it in all its beauty, standing in the hut beneath the stars.

AUTHOR (*staggered*): Did you say standing?

PRESIDENT: Why not?

AUTHOR: But I assure you I had nothing so concrete in mind.

PRESIDENT: The screen is prepared to amplify what you had in mind.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Certainly.

1ST BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

2ND BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Does the bed remain in, Mr. President?

PRESIDENT: Bed remains in.

FILM DIRECTOR: Bed in.

[Pause, while all make notes.]

AUTHOR: I was thinking of a few feathers at most——

PRESIDENT: That can be left to our Director. Now we come to the second queried passage, which includes the words "woman for bodily pleasure." Yes, that is the expression. No such language can be permitted in a picture made by this Corporation.

VICE-PRESIDENT: We are with you, sir.

1ST BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

2ND BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

AUTHOR: But the words must be taken in their context! The bride is described as "bird for the flights of her restless spirit, and woman for . . ."

PRESIDENT: If the bride is restless, that is worse. This entire passage is barred. My board will agree.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Bodily pleasure out.

1ST BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

2ND BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

FILM DIRECTOR: Pleasure out.

[All make a note.]

PRESIDENT: Instead, we shall stress the more elevated and romantic aspect of this marriage. The family is the hub around which this picture must revolve.

AUTHOR: I beg your pardon?

PRESIDENT: The family. These three children in the story are all-important. But they are said to be "babies with rosy beaks," the offspring of a "white-feathered bride."

VICE-PRESIDENT: The public must get everything clear.

PRESIDENT: I agree. Rosy beaks must come out. The bird-nature of any children of this union is pictorially excluded. Make a note of that.

[All make a note.]

VICE-PRESIDENT: Bird-nature excluded.

1ST BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

2ND BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

FILM DIRECTOR: Bird-nature excluded.

PRESIDENT: We come to the next point. These are male children, are they not?

FILM DIRECTOR: Yes, sir. It says somewhere, "Remember you are sons of the wind."

PRESIDENT: I remember, too; that's where she leads them down the promontory. What are these male children wearing?

FILM DIRECTOR: Their mother seems to wear feathers.

PRESIDENT: I didn't ask about their mother. What do the children wear?

AUTHOR (*in desperation*): They wear nothing!

[To his amazement, it is well received.]

PRESIDENT: Good!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Very good!

AUTHOR: But—but don't you mind?

PRESIDENT: To the pure all things are pure. What could be purer than unclad children receding from the camera?

FILM DIRECTOR: One of the shots of the picture.

PRESIDENT: That concludes the queries. Also our business for this afternoon.

AUTHOR: But the rest of the story—the death of the seagull on the icefield——

PRESIDENT: *Is* there a death on the icefield?

FILM DIRECTOR: There *was*.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Three of the versions kept it, three left it out. You gave the casting vote, sir.

PRESIDENT: I remember—*no* death on the icefield. It seemed rather on the morbid side.

AUTHOR: But then—what happens to the seagull?

[Everybody is taken aback.]

VICE-PRESIDENT: We must have thought of that some time.

PRESIDENT: What's in the final script?

FILM DIRECTOR: I believe she goes back to the sailor on his ship.

PRESIDENT: What happens to the seagull? Can't the writers tell us? Here's the author wanting to know!

FILM DIRECTOR (*searching scripts*): Quite right, she does go back—and the children too.

VICE-PRESIDENT: But isn't there a sailor's sweetheart somewhere?

PRESIDENT: Yes, what does *she* say to all that brood?

FILM DIRECTOR: We cut her out last time. The seagull herself is the sailor's sweetheart now.

PRESIDENT: Are you certain?

FILM DIRECTOR: Yes, she wanted so much to go to sea with him, she thought she was a bird.

VICE-PRESIDENT: I remember, in that dream part.

FILM DIRECTOR: The last shot shows them back in the garden at home. Children playing, watching swallows nest. Saying "Birdies."

VICE-PRESIDENT: Why, yes. "Birdies."

PRESIDENT: That seems clear enough.

1ST BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

2ND BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

1ST BOARD MEMBER: Very good.

2ND BOARD MEMBER: Very good.

PRESIDENT: Gentlemen, the O.K. version is passed by this board. That is, unless the author has any further queries?

AUTHOR: No, I think not. In fact—in fact I've decided to leave you an absolutely free hand in the making of this picture.

PRESIDENT (*shaking hands with him*): A very generous attitude, and one much appreciated. In the name of this Corporation I thank you, sir. As our first President said on a similar occasion: "It is the little minds that make difficulties, never the great minds." And how true that proves to be! (*End of handshake.*) We hope our next business can be concluded as happily. (*His hand on the shoulder of the ACTRESS*) With this young lady's permission, the Corporation will present her in the forthcoming picture as their new star. I believe I speak for the entire board?

VICE-PRESIDENT: You do, Mr. President.

1ST BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

2ND BOARD MEMBER: Yes.

PRESIDENT (*memorandum in hand*): The terms,

which in our view are generous, include a five-year contract on a rising scale, to appear in not more than three selected pictures yearly. This will not interfere in any way with the stage career of the artist, always provided that she appears exclusively in plays like the present one, in which the Corporation has a controlling financial interest. The salary clause reads as follows—

ACTRESS: Oh, please don't go any further ! It isn't worth while !

PRESIDENT: I beg your pardon ?

ACTRESS (*breathless*): Oh, I'm sorry, but I couldn't ! Not even for this picture taken from a play I love ! If somebody would give me words I could tell you why. You see, I'm an actress !

VICE-PRESIDENT: You're more than that. You're a star !

ACTRESS: No, no, that isn't more, it's less ! Our parts are what we live by, all of us on stage and screen together ! It was his part that gave me the chance—*his* part—and everything I did was for the play ! If it had failed and been forgotten, then a lovely thing would have been lost. You helped to save it ; we are grateful ; help us now to do more lovely things ! Give us our freedom !

VICE-PRESIDENT: What's that ?

PRESIDENT: Young lady, this Corporation offers you a contract.

ACTRESS: And I ask for a play ! (*Taking the AUTHOR's arm*) He'll write it, because he's free now, as I am free, and I can act in it one evening somewhere—anywhere if there's a stage—before a thousand people, or five hundred, or a hundred if you like—just a few dim people in the dark the other side—listening, understanding,

so that we give ourselves to them—give everything we feel, everything we've ever felt, everything that's in us to give—and go on giving like that every evening—because when night falls we are no longer our own, we belong to *them*—we live in them as they live in us—body and soul we belong to each other—one thought and one breath—we give ourselves because we play, we play because we must, because it is only so we live. Ah, how did I find words? Forgive me, forgive me—we'll go!

[*Laughing, weeping, on the AUTHOR's arm, she is gone.*]

PRESIDENT: Looks like we found a shooting-star!

FILM DIRECTOR: Grand performance! Real tears!

VICE-PRESIDENT (*savagely*): Wait till we've done with that success of hers!

PRESIDENT: You may get busy. Gentlemen, the incident is closed.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Stage of the theatre, the same evening.

MANAGER, *as the curtain rises, stands checking cases of champagne, which have been dumped among the stage properties.*

MANAGER: Six cases. That ought to be enough.

[*ACTRESS and AUTHOR enter.*]

ACTRESS: What, champagne?

MANAGER: Yes, my darling, to celebrate your hundredth night.

AUTHOR: Can the play afford such an extravagance?

MANAGER: Certainly, dear boy: biggest success for years. But the truth is, these cases are a present.

ACTRESS: Splendid! Who *can* have sent them?

MANAGER: The film people—contribution to the party on the stage.

AUTHOR (*aside*): Controlling financial interest?

MANAGER: Aren't you pleased?

ACTRESS: They've just given us a party of their own.

MANAGER: Why, yes, their board met this afternoon. All satisfactory, I hope?

[*A silence.*]

Good, good. One more star in the firmament. Now excuse me.

[*He is about to go.*]

ACTRESS: We would like you to tell us something.

MANAGER: Well?

AUTHOR: May we perhaps ask, who pays to see my play?

MANAGER: My dear fellow, what a question—from an author too. Who pays, indeed? Look at the audiences for yourself! House always full!

ACTRESS: We didn't ask who *comes* to see it.

AUTHOR: No, who pays?

MANAGER: You get a royalty cheque every week.

AUTHOR: I certainly do.

MANAGER: Calculated on the gross. What more do you want?

ACTRESS: Authors' royalties don't cost much.

MANAGER: Then think of my salary list ! Could I afford it ?

ACTRESS: The company's inexpensive, too.

MANAGER: Oho, I see ! The leading lady wants her salary raised ! Why not say so, my darling ?

ACTRESS: Because I *don't* want it raised.

MANAGER: Then excuse me again. I'm busy.

[*He is about to go.*]

ACTRESS: We're asking this for a reason that may interest you.

MANAGER (*more intimately*): Well, my dear young people ?

AUTHOR: We're thinking of a theatre for a play.

MANAGER: But you already have one—*my* theatre !

AUTHOR: That's the one we're thinking of.

ACTRESS: For another play when this one's over. Of course, we realise that might not be for months.

MANAGER: In this business you never know.

ACTRESS: Or it might be next week.

MANAGER: Come, come, really ! Next week—with the business we're doing !

AUTHOR: Whenever it is, we want a theatre. So, of course, we come to you.

MANAGER: Hum ! No doubt you were *thinking* of a tenancy ? May I ask how much *capital* would be available ?

AUTHOR: You remember my sale of the screen rights ?

MANAGER: Most certainly. I paid you your half-share last week.

ACTRESS: That would be one thousand, and we can raise another.

MANAGER: Two thousand? (*Reflecting*) I don't say it's impossible. Is the play written yet?

AUTHOR: It's nearly finished. All but the last act.

MANAGER: What is the title?

AUTHOR: *In Theatre Street*. I must tell you it has no scenery at all.

MANAGER: I beg your pardon?

AUTHOR: No scenery.

ACTRESS: It just happens on a stage like this.

MANAGER: Oh, I see. One of those imaginative plays!

AUTHOR: Yes, one of those.

MANAGER: How big a cast?

AUTHOR: Fifteen to twenty.

MANAGER: Couldn't you make it less?

ACTRESS: No, he couldn't. Remember the scenery.

MANAGER: I don't mind telling you I had in mind a revival of *The Tempest*.

AUTHOR (*taken aback*): *The Tempest*?

MANAGER: Shakespeare's play. I've always wanted to do it, but somehow these projects never come to anything. No.

AUTHOR (*encouragingly*): No.

ACTRESS: No.

MANAGER: I thought of Ibsen, too, and Chekhov. But why support dead authors?

AUTHOR: Why indeed?

MANAGER: You know, in spite of everything, I love the theatre.

ACTRESS: I believe, in spite of everything, you do.

MANAGER: It would be a real pleasure to put on a masterpiece. And, when you come to it, what else counts?

AUTHOR: Nothing, when you come to it.

MANAGER: Then you and I can talk. Meanwhile I promise you—no *Tempest*.

AUTHOR: No *Tempest*.

ACTRESS: No *Tempest*.

MANAGER: Would you care to jot down a few figures now?

ACTRESS: No, we've had enough business for to-day. (*She takes the AUTHOR's arm.*)

MANAGER: Coming to the party to-night?

ACTRESS: He wants to get home to work.

MANAGER: A glass of champagne now, then, to seal our bargain?

AUTHOR: Not their champagne!

ACTRESS: Wait till *our* hundredth night!

AUTHOR: Yes, *our* hundredth!

MANAGER: *Au revoir*, then.

AUTHOR: *Au revoir*.

[ACTRESS and AUTHOR go. MANAGER, smiling, is about to leave the stage for his office when he runs into the FILM VICE-PRESIDENT.]

MANAGER: Hullo, you here?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Looked for you in your office. Show still running nicely, hey?

MANAGER: You know how well it's running.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Last week's net loss four hundred.

MANAGER: But worth it every time. Think of your picture. Think of that lovely girl, and what she's worth to you.

VICE-PRESIDENT: I'm thinking of the picture—and the lovely girl. This show closes Saturday.

MANAGER: *Next* Saturday? But you're not serious!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Saturday.

MANAGER: But—but—is any reason given?

VICE-PRESIDENT: My Corporation gives no reasons.

MANAGER (*with dignity*): Very well. I shall be obliged to revive *The Tempest*.

VICE-PRESIDENT: What's that?

MANAGER: You wouldn't know the play, but it doesn't matter.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Theatre on your hands? We'll talk about your price again. So long.

[VICE-PRESIDENT goes.]

CURTAIN

SCENE III

The stage of the theatre, two months later.

PRODUCER, at foot of ladder, speaking to PROPERTY MAN above. *A painted suit of armour drops, missing PRODUCER's head.*

PRODUCER: Here, Props! Mind what you're chucking down!

PROPERTY MAN: It's only armour.

PRODUCER: Any more junk up there?

PROPERTY MAN: Only that poet—I've got a rope to let him down gently.

PRODUCER: Come on, then.

[Dangling and twisting fantastically, the figure of the poet is let down.]

PROPERTY MAN (*above*): Got him safe?

PRODUCER: Yes. Our old friend.

PROPERTY MAN: He was in the play before last. I was always mending his what-d'ye-may-call-it. Now it's broken again.

PRODUCER: Doesn't matter now.

[PROPERTY MAN appears, descending ladder.]

PROPERTY MAN: What I say is, good thing we never did that *Tempest* after all.

PRODUCER: Why?

PROPERTY MAN: There was a ship in it. What we've got's enough for me to handle.

PRODUCER: Flies all clear now?

PROPERTY MAN: Nothing but dust up there—plenty of that. (*He shakes out his coat.*) There was a rag-and-bone man came this morning early. Asked if we had anything would burn. Scenery or anything.

PRODUCER: Well, let him have it.

PROPERTY MAN: Like a fool, I said it was all fireproofed. Else I might have sold him the ice-field. He's coming back again. Wants paper chiefly, so he says.

PRODUCER: All right, go and have a drink. On petty cash.

PROPERTY MAN: Thank you, sir, I will. (*He finds*

something.) Well, I never, here's one of them wings off of the first lady seagull.

PRODUCER: Keepsake for you.

PROPERTY MAN: No, what I'm after is that poet—I shall ask the governor for him.

[PROPERTY MAN goes. A moment afterwards
FILM VICE-PRESIDENT enters.]

VICE-PRESIDENT: Still here, I see?

PRODUCER: We shall be clear this evening.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Pretty god-awful mess. No wonder your manager was mad to sell.

PRODUCER: I wonder he never sold before.

VICE-PRESIDENT: We couldn't get his price down—not while your first lady seagull fed him from the hand.

PRODUCER: The second lady seagull was *your* bit of trouble.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Must you remind me of that? Wait; you were the producer of that play.

PRODUCER: I was.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Got a new job yet?

PRODUCER: No.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Want one?

PRODUCER: I shall to-morrow.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Globe Film Corporation finds me from ten to five.

PRODUCER: Thanks.

VICE-PRESIDENT: So long.

PRODUCER: So long.

[VICE-PRESIDENT goes. CHARACTER MAN and
CHARACTER WOMAN enter carrying bundles and an
iron washstand painted white.]

CHARACTER MAN: Our dressing-rooms are empty.

PRODUCER I should guess they were.

CHARACTER MAN: Excuse me, but was that the gentleman from the Film Corporation ?

PRODUCER: It was the Vice-President.

CHARACTER MAN Do you think he'd give us jobs if we asked him ?

PRODUCER: He will if you *don't* ask him.

CHARACTER MAN: Thanks, that's worth knowing Wonderful what you pick up in this profession.

PRODUCER You seem to have picked up a lot
[*He indicates the various properties.*]

CHARACTER MAN These are just a few things

CHARACTER WOMAN. Things we've brought in from time to time The lino's really ours.

PRODUCER And your washstand has been famous for a generation

CHARACTER MAN (*with pride*) Yes, it's a fine washstand Solid iron, unbreakable. Made some people think that we were married.

CHARACTER WOMAN Now, now !

PRODUCER And aren't you ?

CHARACTER WOMAN: Not on your life !

CHARACTER MAN: If I may say so, it's entirely her fault we are not.

CHARACTER WOMAN: Now get along with you !

CHARACTER MAN: But many a night the washstand kept us on good terms.

CHARACTER WOMAN: You see, we shared it.

CHARACTER MAN: And now we don't know whose it is.

CHARACTER WOMAN: He says it's mine.

PRODUCER: You'd better go on sharing.

CHARACTER MAN: Here's the key. There's not a photo left upstairs.

PRODUCER: You might want the key again.

CHARACTER WOMAN: No. I couldn't go back there, I just couldn't.

CHARACTER MAN: We came to say good-bye all round.

PRODUCER: All the rest are late.

CHARACTER MAN (*forcing a laugh*): Just as if this was a rehearsal!

PRODUCER: Yes. You might lend the wardrobe mistress a hand, both of you. She's packing costumes.

CHARACTER WOMAN: What's going to happen to them?

PRODUCER (*with a shrug*): Bought by touring companies, I suppose.

CHARACTER MAN: *Our* costumes?

CHARACTER WOMAN: All full of moth?

PRODUCER: That's an idea—put in moth-balls.

CHARACTER MAN: Moth-balls—come on—moth-balls!

[*He drags off the CHARACTER WOMAN, at the verge of tears. PRODUCER alone for a moment, then the ACTOR enters.*]

ACTOR:

"The times are out of joint. O cursed spite
That ever I was born . . ."

Shall I ever play Hamlet again? And does anybody care?

PRODUCER: You're going on tour, they tell me.

ACTOR: Yes. It means bad hotels and sleepless nights—but how can I sleep anyway when I'm not playing? As I lie there, old parts come back to me, hundreds and hundreds of lines from dead plays; more than the authors themselves would remember. I say them over without knowing what they mean—just as if I were on the stage, you see—and then suddenly, would you believe it, I dry up in the night and snap my fingers for the prompter?

PRODUCER: I believe it.

ACTOR: Not that I need prompting much. I was always a quick study—two days' rehearsal and word-perfect. But stage memory's a queer thing. It leaves you in the middle of a scene for no reason at all, leaves you stuck in the mud, over the shoes in it, feeling the damndest fool alive. There you stand on the stage, and the people in front not a penny the wiser!

PRODUCER: We hope not.

ACTOR: Oh, I can tell you, those are the actor's moments! When I pull myself out of the mess, with some cry or movement that never belonged to the part at all—or perhaps with a whole speech, God help authors, that never was written—then I say to myself, "Good for you, old boy. Why, you can act after all! I never thought it of you!" Once I really said those words aloud.

PRODUCER: No!

ACTOR: Those very words—in the middle of *Macbeth*. I can tell you they went over great. For two pins the audience would have stood up and cheered. Yes, the actor's moments count! But everything counts on a stage. When I see one single movement without meaning, one rise or cross-over, one wave of a hand—I could shout the play down! Think of it—a man who

has been seated rises, a man who has risen sits. It should be staggering, prodigious ! A wonder of the world !

PRODUCER : You needn't tell me that.

ACTOR : Sorry, old boy. I was talking to myself. But, for the actor, to act is what you might call an adjustment. The needful thing to balance his world. Like sex—the poise of life, the mental and physical necessity. Well, must clear that dressing-room. See you later !

PRODUCER : So long !

[*Enter COMEDIAN and SHOW GIRL—the latter the MESSENGER GIRL of Part I.*]

COMEDIAN : Don't tell me I'm late.

PRODUCER : Then don't tell me you were filming.

COMEDIAN : As a matter of fact, I was. Meet my friend. She's in the profession herself—musical show up the street.

PRODUCER (*regarding her*) : Haven't we met before ?

SHOW GIRL : Yes, that's right ! I used to be in costumes. Brought that pair of wings here for the seagull lady. My goodness, how she did carry on ! But it was coming here that afternoon that made me think of going on the stage.

PRODUCER (*drily*) : We have a lot to answer for.

SHOW GIRL : I wasn't stage-struck ; don't think that. But I said to myself, Though it's draughty and dirty, it leads you somewhere in the end.

[*She takes the COMEDIAN's arm.*]

COMEDIAN : And she'll get on, mark my words. Maybe not in legitimate, but she'll get on.

PRODUCER : What about yourself ?

COMEDIAN: Film work. Doing the bird-shop man in that picture from our play. It's a real part now; plenty of comedy; just my style.

PRODUCER: An improvement, do you think?

COMEDIAN: Every longer part's an improvement. Now I must clear my belongings. Can my friend stay here a bit?

PRODUCER: Why, surely.

COMEDIAN: Don't want to start introductions on a day like this—it doesn't mix with partings.

PRODUCER: You may be right.

[COMEDIAN *is about to go.*

SHOW GIRL: Now, remember what you meant to tell him.

COMEDIAN: Oh, yes. (*To PRODUCER, indicating SHOW GIRL*) Since we've been friends, we slip into the country now and then. And last week-end, in a quiet little place—it doesn't matter where—who should we run into but our author and the second lady seagull! Looked as if *they* were friends too.

SHOW GIRL: I must say it did!

COMEDIAN: We had a little talk, and she told us he was finishing a new play.

PRODUCER: That's not bad news. But did you tell him the old theatre was finishing too?

COMEDIAN: No, I only heard when we came back to town. It was a very quiet place where they were staying.

SHOW GIRL: It certainly was! (*She looks about her.*) Pretty well as quiet as this place.

PRODUCER: Have a chair while you're waiting.

SHOW GIRL: Oh, don't mind me!

COMEDIAN: She's not really used to sitting on a stage, except by accident !

SHOW GIRL: Now, now !

[COMEDIAN *goes*. SHOW GIRL *wanders around*.

PRODUCER: Theatre's a sort of lumber-room always.

SHOW GIRL: I must say *costumes* have it beat for tidiness.

[SHOW GIRL *goes off into the wings*. MANAGER *enters, and comes to* PRODUCER.

MANAGER: *My* theatre—to think it should ever come to this ! *My* theatre—one short week from destruction !

PRODUCER (*curtly*): Why not buy it back again ?

MANAGER: No, no, it had to be ! Living theatre is dead, annihilated by the machines !

PRODUCER: The machines are all right—the only trouble is the men.

MANAGER: No, no. Look at the screen, radio, television—all our enemies !

PRODUCER: The only enemies I know are artists' enemies. Buyers, sellers, brokers, gamblers, opportunists !

MANAGER: You have no imagination, or else no heart. Think of everything these walls have seen and heard !

PRODUCER: And then think of what they *might* have seen and heard !

MANAGER: Ah, you mean I should have made my production of *The Tempest* ! But we are all human. By the way, who is the girl in the wings ?

PRODUCER: Somebody's lady friend.

MANAGER: Ah, yes. What was I saying? All of us have lost opportunities.

PRODUCER: Excuse me, but is there anything queer about me to-day? Do I look like a playwright or anything?

MANAGER: No, I don't think so. Why do you ask?

PRODUCER: Because everybody who comes on this stage confides in me.

MANAGER: My dear fellow, it is the end—we all feel it. All these thirty years I have known that it was coming.

PRODUCER: It was never your own fault, was it?

MANAGER: No, no. Inexorable fate! Tragedy! I don't trust myself to speak of it any more. Come with me to the dressing-rooms. We have to say farewells.

PRODUCER: All right, if you must.

[They are just going off when the RAG-AND-BONE MAN enters. MANAGER views him with distaste.]

MANAGER: Who is that man?

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: Rag-and-bone man.

MANAGER: What?

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: Rag-and-bone man, guv'nor.

MANAGER: Disgusting profession. What do you want?

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: Anything you've got, guv'nor.

MANAGER: Take him away! Go away, fellow!

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: I want to see the gentleman I saw before.

MANAGER: Do you hear me?

PRODUCER: He may have some business with the Props.

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: Yus, that gentleman.

MANAGER: I won't have him in my theatre! Get rid of him! Props! Props!

[PROPERTY MAN *enters*.

PROPERTY MAN: Yes, sir? Leave him to me, sir. Come along, you, come along!

MANAGER (*to PRODUCER*): You see what we come down to—rag-and-bone men!

[MANAGER *and* PRODUCER *go off together*.
RAG-AND-BONE MAN *and* PROPERTY MAN *remain*.

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: Here, what about it?

PROPERTY MAN: What about what?

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: You said there was paper in the place.

PROPERTY MAN: So there is paper, stacks of it. How are you going to get it away?

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: I've brought a pram for a start.

[*He trundles a pram out of the wings*.

PROPERTY MAN: Come on to the office, then, before the gov'nor comes back.

[PROPERTY MAN *and* RAG-AND-BONE MAN *go off*. ACTRESS *enters with* AUTHOR, *who carries a manuscript*.

AUTHOR: Here at last!

ACTRESS: Yes, at last!

AUTHOR: Happy?

ACTRESS: Am I happy? Here in our own

theatre ! Let me take a deep breath—yes, it even smells the same !

AUTHOR : I seem to notice fresh odours—if one can call them fresh.

ACTRESS : Only canvas, size, fireproofing, and honest dirt ! This old musty stage, how it belongs to us ! More than any home !

AUTHOR : You make me feel as you have always felt.

ACTRESS : I want you to belong to the stage, bodily, as I do, so that you write and live for it !

AUTHOR : All right, I'll try.

ACTRESS : Just look how everything is yours. Here's the door of your sailor's hut. Most of the icefield too—they must be doing a spring-clean this autumn. I never knew them clean this theatre before.

AUTHOR : Well, it can do no harm.

ACTRESS : Now for the office.

AUTHOR : Wait. Suppose he won't rent us his theatre ?

ACTRESS : Trust him for that, and remember the figures I told you. We only need to take fifty a night.

AUTHOR : It seems a lot of money.

ACTRESS : Not if you look at it properly. People still go to church ; they still take their dose of music and painting. Why not their little dose of poetry and drama too ?

AUTHOR : Indeed, why not ? But are you quite sure we're in the right theatre ?

ACTRESS : Now, my darling, really !

AUTHOR : They all look alike to me, especially behind. Did we come in the right way ?

ACTRESS: Surely you know the passage to the stage door—with our old posters on the walls!

AUTHOR: I didn't see any doorkeeper.

ACTRESS: He's just out for a drink—has been for years.

AUTHOR: It all looks different somehow. Like something never seen before, something fated.

ACTRESS: But so it is, for us both! We've come to do our own play—*your* play—to please ourselves and everybody else.

AUTHOR: Let's go and find somebody. There must be people about.

ACTRESS: Let me call them. Props! Electrics! Props! Pro-ops!

PROPERTY MAN (*off-stage*): Coming, miss!

ACTRESS: There, you see!

[PROPERTY MAN *enters*, followed by RAG-AND-BONE MAN *wheeling his pram*.]

PROPERTY MAN: Well, miss, if it isn't you! (*To AUTHOR*) And you, sir. Glad to see you back again!

AUTHOR: Thank you.

ACTRESS: Glad to see *you*, Props.

PROPERTY MAN: Thank you, miss.

AUTHOR: But what have you got there?

PROPERTY MAN: Oh, that! Just plays.

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: Close on two hundred-weight.

AUTHOR: Plays!

ACTRESS: Is *everybody* writing them?

[AUTHOR *examines the load*.]

AUTHOR: They really *are* plays!

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: Any use to you, guv'nor?

AUTHOR: Take them into the office!

PROPERTY MAN: The office is where they come from—two big cupboards full!

ACTRESS: What?

PROPERTY MAN: *And* another load to come, miss!

AUTHOR: But—but were these plays ever read?

PROPERTY MAN: Search me!

ACTRESS: What happens to them now?

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: Bought for pulp—two hundredweight.

AUTHOR: No, no, that's impossible!

PROPERTY MAN: You wouldn't have us burn 'em, sir?

AUTHOR: Certainly not! These plays are the authors' property! They must go back by registered mail!

[PROPERTY MAN *takes envelope from pram.*

PROPERTY MAN: Look at that, sir; look at the stamps on it. Last reign but two. Lots of authors of these plays are dead.

ACTRESS: He's right; it's better to forget them. Let him wheel them away.

AUTHOR: No, take them back.

PROPERTY MAN: Back where?

AUTHOR: To the manager's room, where he can read them.

PROPERTY MAN: Beg pardon, sir, but have you heard this theatre's sold?

ACTRESS: Sold?

PROPERTY MAN: Yes, miss. Our last day here.

AUTHOR: But what play comes on next?

PROPERTY MAN: Theatre's coming down, sir.

ACTRESS: Who—who bought it?

PROPERTY MAN: Globe Film Corporation they call themselves.

[Enter FILM VICE-PRESIDENT.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Yes, sir, that is so.

ACTRESS: You?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Not my fault, young lady. It was in the market for years.

ACTRESS: Stage and screen—always in the market!

AUTHOR: Suppose we go away?

VICE-PRESIDENT: No hurry. You're welcome to look around. Place is all yours until to-morrow.

ACTRESS: Thank you, but we thought of staying longer.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Your mistake. Sorry.

ACTRESS: Yes, our mistake!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Roof will be gone this day next week—walls a week later.

AUTHOR: And then dust and plaster—a hole in the earth where a stage used to be!

VICE-PRESIDENT: That's right.

ACTRESS: But listen, this is a theatre! Give us one more chance, just a few more days or weeks! His play will run—only read it!

[VICE-PRESIDENT turns to RAG-AND-BONE MAN.

VICE-PRESIDENT: What are you waiting for?

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: Waiting for more, gov'nor.

AUTHOR: Here, then, take this one! Take it!

[*He throws his own manuscript on to the pram with the rest.*]

VICE-PRESIDENT: What's that—a play?

AUTHOR: Yes, one of a thousand!

ACTRESS: One in a thousand!

[VICE-PRESIDENT *picks up play.*]

VICE-PRESIDENT: *In Theatre Street*—that the title?

AUTHOR: It was.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Sounds to me not bad.

ACTRESS: You have it in your hands. Read it!

[VICE-PRESIDENT *weighs manuscript in his hand.*]

VICE-PRESIDENT: Not yet produced?

AUTHOR: No—nor likely to be!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Any screen rights available?

AUTHOR (*savagely*): No!

ACTRESS: He means yes—all rights available!

AUTHOR: I said no!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Pity. We could have used that title for a back-stage picture.

[*He tosses the manuscript back on to the pram.*]

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: 'That all, guv'nor?

AUTHOR: Unless you want to wheel us both away, stage and screen together?

VICE-PRESIDENT: Not my Corporation. No, sir!

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: Too big a load for me.

[PROPERTY MAN *takes manuscript from pram and hands it to ACTRESS.*]

PROPERTY MAN: Souvenir for you, miss. Sure it's the right one?

ACTRESS: Yes, Props, thank you.

PROPERTY MAN: My keepsake's going to be that poet. (*To RAG-AND-BONE MAN*) Now you can be off!

RAG-AND-BONE MAN: All right, snatcher!

[He wheels off his pram.]

PROPERTY MAN (*calling after him*): Snatcher yourself!

VICE-PRESIDENT: Well, I'm sorry. Business is business, you know. Evening, all.

[He goes off. In the doorway he is passed by the ELECTRICIAN, who enters in overalls.]

PROPERTY MAN: Hullo, Electrics. What's your new rig-out?

ELECTRICIAN: I'm with the Electrical Supply Company now. (*To the others*) Evening, miss. Evening, sir. (*In an undertone to PROPERTY MAN*) Come to seal off the mains.

PROPERTY MAN: Nice job for our Electrics, I must say! Cuttin' off the light from his own theatre!

ELECTRICIAN: Is it my fault?

ACTRESS: Better tell them at the office, Props.

MANAGER (*calling in corridor outside*): All on the stage!

PROPERTY MAN: The guv'nor's coming, miss. I hear him now.

ACTRESS: Must we have speeches too?

[MANAGER enters and greets AUTHOR and ACTRESS with handshakes.]

MANAGER: Ah, my friends, here in time! Here for the last time. They told you everything?

ACTRESS: They told us enough.

AUTHOR: Quite enough !

[CHARACTER MAN and CHARACTER WOMAN, PRODUCER, and COMEDIAN enter. All take up positions as for a ceremony.

MANAGER: My friends ! You will expect a word. I trust myself only to tell you what this parting means to me—this ending of the years that you and I have spent together. Our theatre you see before you. It was falling into ruins ; it was doomed to vanish from this world. Its successes have been yours, but I know well its failures have been mine.

CHARACTER WOMAN (*sobbing*) : No, no !

MANAGER: Yes ! Too well I know it ! Never even did I make my production of *The Tempest*. If the public failed us, I too must bear the blame. And now that my theatre is bought from me—*my* theatre—it is I who pay the price. You will go to other stages, you will find other outlets for your talent ; but I who love the theatre shall be homeless. My friends, my friends ! One who is about to quit the scene salutes you and will not forget you. He makes his exit now—forgive him that he goes before you ! Farewell !

[*He shakes the hand of each in turn, the PROPERTY MAN last.*

PROPERTY MAN: Pardon me askin', guv'nor. but could I have the poet for a keepsake ? Him there ?

[*He indicates property figure in wings.*

MANAGER: The poet ! By all means, my good fellow ! By all means ! Farewell !

[MANAGER goes out quickly. The rest of the company gather their valises and belongings and follow him in silence. AUTHOR and ACTRESS remain alone.

AUTHOR: No, no, it's impossible !

ACTRESS: What is impossible?

AUTHOR: This stage cannot pass away like a mist or a dream! These living creatures that we know, ceaselessly struggling with themselves and one another—they *must* make their reckoning with life in spoken words. Else they could have no more thoughts or passions—else they could not even suffer any more! They would be less than men and women!

ACTRESS: You can make them more than men and women! We together can fulfil their desire!

AUTHOR: But how can I write, if this is to be the scene of my play? Who in this world needs me any longer? Why should my work end anywhere but on the rag-and-bone man's pair of scales?

ACTRESS: Because we are your witness—because our lips are yours! Our living bodies yours!

[*The PRODUCER enters, keys in hand.*]

PRODUCER: Afraid I must put out the lights and lock the theatre.

AUTHOR: Yes, yes, we are going.

[*PRODUCER begins switching off lights.*]

ACTRESS (*to AUTHOR*): But look, there you have the ending for your play! Splendid!

AUTHOR: Monstrous and abominable!

ACTRESS: But how right!

[*PRODUCER leaves one pilot light, and waits, keys in hand.*]

AUTHOR: You leave one light, I see?

PRODUCER: The electrician's cutting the supply this moment.

AUTHOR: If we happen to go the same way——?

PRODUCER: Thank you, I shall be glad of a lift.

[ACTRESS and AUTHOR tiptoe out, arm in arm, and PRODUCER follows them. An iron door is heard closing, and a key turns in a lock. The pilot light goes out abruptly. Then gradually the lights go up again. The ACTOR enters from the wings, comes downstage, and addresses the audience.

ACTOR: People ! The play you have seen is like every other play—it never happened yet. Let it never happen, for that depends on you ! While you listen, laugh and weep and tremble, and believe in us, so long our dreams can last ! So long we can endow them with a life that you can share ! People, know me and understand me ! I am not a personage any more, but an actor who played an actor ! If by your own will you condemn me to vanish from the stage, you break your own communion with yourselves and one another ! Go now, but only to return—here or to some other house where living words are spoken ! All on, please. Take your call.

[The COMPANY come on.

THE END

THE WOMEN

Clare Boothe

THE WOMEN

A Play

in Three Acts

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To
BUFF COBB
with love

FOREWORD

The Women is a satirical play about a numerically small group of ladies native to the Park Avenues of America. It was clearly so conceived and patently so executed. The title, which embraces half the human species, is therefore rather too roomy. It was chosen, ungenerously it may seem, from a host of more generic titles—"Park Avenue," "The Girls," "The Ladies"—simply because it was laconic, original and not altogether too remote. Moreover, its very generality seemed to hold a wide audience appeal, a consideration which few commercial dramatists are required to ignore. This having been frankly stated, I am sure that few readers will be distracted by the width of the title from the narrowness of the play's aim: a clinical study of a more or less isolated group, projected, perhaps in bad temper, but in good faith. The reader, who, warned of this, nevertheless claims to discover in it a portrait of *all* womankind, is obviously bound to experience the paradoxical discomfort which ensues to the wearer when the shoe unexpectedly fits.

Of course, an honest misogynist might conceivably make a case for the title's just applicability to the play's content. He might even be able to prove that all the unkind particularities of *The Women* are generally relevant to the sex. With scant research, and the aid of many authorities, he could show that even history's notably nice women have been notably few. He might even ask you to try naming ten famous women of history, famous for their good works, sweet tempers, irreproachable morals and womanly virtues. And the calendar of the Church's virgins and saints, once exhausted, you might be hard put to it to find three for your temporal list.

Mr. Heywood Broun, who was unfortunately deceived by the title, paused long enough in his celebrated prosecution of crimes against the body politic to assail what he called this play's "crime against the spirit." He quoted Mr. Burke to sustain his thesis that *The Women* "degraded the whole human race." A good misogynist would begin by quoting Mr. Burke back to him, as the ungallant author of the brute statement: "A woman is an animal, and an animal not of the highest order." Strindberg, Schopenhauer, Ibsen and a great horde of other bilious misogynists, including St. Paul, could then be called upon to uphold speciously, no doubt, but brilliantly that loutish definition. But I have no heart for the easy game of woman-baiting. Far from resenting Mr. Broun's knightly indignation, I find it adorable. He is, notably and belligerently, a man of intellectual integrity. It gives one, as a woman, a delicious thrill of power and contentment to know that he is being truer to his chivalrous instincts than to his political ideals when he says of *The Women*: "I would not like it—even if I were informed it had been financed by Moscow gold." Indeed, like most women, I would not, if I could, disillusion any of the courtly gentlemen who believe in the uncloyed sweetness of *Woman*. And I truly, heartily and thankfully echo the cry of all who have been revolted by the *specific* bitterness of *The Women* that "All women are not like that!" (It would be a sad world if they were—as indeed it is a sad world anyway.)

And to grow personal, in the fashion of a few critics, none of my friends is like that—few of my acquaintances. But such mischievous women have crossed my path, as Hedda Gabler must have crossed Ibsen's, and, recently, Mary Tilford crossed Lillian Hellman's in *The Children's Hour*. (Did Miss Hellman have to face

the alarming accusation that she wrote an indictment of *all* childhood?) I did *not* like *these* women. I liked them so little that I put them into this small Doomsday Book, in order to rid myself once and for all of their hauntingly ungracious images. (Catharsis which produces much criticism seldom produces art, but it is, after all, an old and accepted phenomenon among artists.)

Now, whether or not, this play is a good *play* is any man's business to say. But whether or not it is a true portrait of *such* women is a matter which no man can adequately judge, for the good reason that all their actions and emotions are shown forth in places and times which no man has ever witnessed. "Vas you there, Charlie?" . . . The patriotic Daughters of the American Revolution were notoriously harsh judges of soldiery, as demonstrated in *What Price Glory?* The fact that their fathers were soldiers did not make them good judges of life on the Western Front. So all sentimental gentlemen, young and old, who read this book, are here warned that the fact that their mothers were women does not constitute them, *ipso facto*, able critics of Life in *The Women's No-Man's Land*. War and love among *these* women is also an unperfumed business. Watching it, a man will do well to forget all that he wishes to *think* about "woman," and remember only what, from time to time, he has *felt* about some. My only feeling, when the curtain rose on the first night, was that perhaps I had not done justice to the *awfulness* of these few. But if I failed to do them justice, I awoke to find, the following morning, that the critics had not pulled their hunches. Here is a partial list of descriptive nouns and adjectives applied by the Gentlemen of the Press to the Ladies of the Ensemble:

Cats	Fiendish liars	Feline
Plain cats	Insatiablers	Glossy
Tiger cats	Cheats	Gross
Supercilious cats	False friends	Hard-boiled
Malignant cats	Irrepressible	Hateful
Hell cats	interlopers	Intriguing
Cat o'nine	Meddlers	Lurid
tongues	Barbaric savages	Malicious
Cobras	Rogues	Miasmatic
Female lice	Fleurs du Mal	Murderous
Ostriches	Unregenerate	Mean-spirited
Werewolves	worldlings	Merciless
Vixens	Wretched souls	Petty
Zoological freaks	A smelly lot	Remorseless
Harlots	Acid	Repugnant
Odious harpies	Adder-fanged	Repellent
Brazen hussies	Avaricious	Rotten
Stalking hussies	Bawdy	Scurrilous
Lewd hussies	Carbolic	Silly
Jades	Cynical	Sinister
Sluts	Evil	Spiteful
Trollopes	Evil-tempered	Stupid
Parasites	Flashy	Terrifying
Poison-tongues	Flossy	Two-faced
Tittle-tattlers	Frightful	Venomous
Gossip-peddlers	Filthy	Vicious
Slanders	Fiendish	Wicked

which, the reader of this book will soon discover, is in the aggregate much harsher language than the dialogue will unfold. I am indebted, however, to this list for a few pertinent epithets which I myself was too faint-hearted to use about *The Women*.

But all this is doing an injustice to the reader who tackles this foreword before he does the play. Such horrendous approbrium must lead him to anticipate a bloodthirsty gang of Borgias, whose crimes would add another circle to Dante's *Inferno*. His expectations are doomed to disappointment. He will experience, I am afraid, the same let-down that deflates audiences of mystery plays which build up to a terrific climax amidst shrieks of "There's a killer loose in this house," when the fiend incarnate turns out to be the heretofore comic butler. My villainesses' skull-duggery is far from fiendish, and themselves too

unprepossessingly funny to give the audience a really bang-up shudder. For, as I have confessed, the case against "the ladies" in *The Women* has been grossly understated. At worst, they are shown as merely vulgar, silly and futile. Their infidelities would hardly make good tabloid reading. Their shrewish gossip is far less inaccurate, wounding, deadly than that of the masculine columnists you and I enjoy in the daily prints. Indeed, most Manhattanites, who in speakeasies and night clubs and restaurants have so often heard the brighter masculine minds of Broadway destroy a half-dozen friends before cock-crow for the sake of a frequently not so witty witticism, will certainly find *The Women*, by comparison, a pathetically tame bunch of tittle-tats.

Again, the reader, titillated by the above-listed spine-prickling abstract of *The Women*, will be further disappointed to find, among the inadequate furies, a number of "nice women." He will detect in the briefly-sketched characters of Mrs. Morehead, the cooks, Nancy, Peggy, the hairdressers, the nurse, Lucy, the cigarette girl and the maids, at least rudiments of decency, common sense, generosity and social conscience. Because they are somewhat unwilling satellites in the garish orbits in which they swing, these traits are necessarily blurred a bit. Furthermore, an understandable indignation and petulance in them, against the odious principals, mar the otherwise sweet serenity of their natures. Nevertheless, it is there.

Of course, the heroine, Mary, is nice. Indeed, a reasonable objection to her may be that she is "too damned nice." She is positively "saccharine." She is "sugar content." It is a sad truism in the theatre that the customer has got not only to pay his \$3.30, but he's got to root for somebody besides. In spite of her redeeming qualities of faithfulness and sweetness, the difficulty about

rooting for Mary is obviously that she is so stupid you hardly give a hoot. (Perhaps her very inadequacy provides the play with a good modern moral where none was intended. "Be intelligent, fair maid and let who will be, good.") But the dilemma which faced me in drawing this central character was this: If she had been drawn three-dimensionally as even a reasonably intelligent woman, she would have made short shrift of her enemies, and therefore, of my little play. Creatures like Edith and Sylvia and Crystal can breed no "worthy antagonists." A "nice" stupid woman is victimised by their nonsense; a "nice" intelligent woman ignores them completely. Indeed, when, in the last act, Mary is penetrated by a belated glimmer of intelligence, and proceeds to act for three minutes with a modicum of common sense, she brings down the curtain on the utter rout of her enemies. Why, had she been one-tenth as intelligent as her own cook, as far back as Act One, Scene 4, she would have taken her husband from Crystal as Grant took Richmond. Or, to press the logic, if she had been intelligent in Act One, Scene 1, she would have so deliberately eschewed the bridge players that she would have found herself not in *this* play, but across the street in a play by Mr. Coward.

Precisely, alas, what these women are not, are social characters worthy of that gentleman's bright, rapier wit. The women who inspired this play deserved to be smacked across the head with a meat-axe. And that, I flatter myself, is exactly what I smacked them with. They are vulgar and dirty-minded, and alien to grace, and I would not if I could—which, I hasten to say I cannot—gloss their obscenities with a wit which is foreign to them, and gild their futilities with a glamour which by birth and breeding and performance they do not possess. They are the advocates of the hackneyed, devotees of the

wisecrack, high priestesses of the banal. That they speak not with the tongues of angels, or even diabolically clever sophisticates, to charm the critical ear from a harsh scrutiny of their indecencies, but with the tongues of fishwives and bartenders, can be laid at the door of good reportage. Everything they say and do is in deplorable taste, because everything I have ever heard such women say and do *is* in deplorable taste. But indeed, if one is not susceptible to their ludicrousness, tickled by their gargantuan absurdities, one is quite justified in being either bored or appalled by them.

The plot, like the heroine, by current dramatic standards, is also "weak." It was knowingly intended to be no more than a peg on which to hang this bedraggled bit of Park Avenue plumage. It is deliberately a commonplace squirrel-cage, full of holes, getting nowhere, serving only the purpose of further emphasising the miniscule, foolish, whirligig activities of a few cancerous little squirrels, whose little cheeks bulge with rotten little nuts, which in their civilised little cage they have neither the wit, nor the place, to hide.

But that the antics of these women do strike most audiences as funny, instead of dull or nauseating, as they might quite reasonably have done, is a very happy accident for me at the box-office. I am immensely gratified by the play's success, and properly appreciative of whom I have to thank—the women who are its staunchest advocates and best customers—the women *who do not think* "all women are like that." These many have gleefully recognised in my harpies, not themselves, but a certain few deservedly despised, and cursedly ubiquitous, sisters of theirs, whose chastisement leaves them, as it left me, content.

To the reader this apology is due: for publishing this play in book form at all. A book-play,

no matter how charitably and imaginatively read, is nothing more than the bare bones of a play. Mr. Max Gordon's unstinted production, Mr. Joseph Mielziner's deft and authentic sets, Mr. John Hambleton's elegant costumes, beautifully padded these bare bones with seductive dramatic flesh. As Charita Bauer, the exquisite child-actress who plays Little Mary, said to me one dark rehearsal day: "Never you mind, even if it's *not* a success, it's going to *look* lovely!" It did. Above all, that flesh was made instinct with gay life by the ingenuity and witty tempo of Mr. Robert Sinclair's direction, and the delicious characterisations of the forty-odd actresses, too many here to praise severally. And quickly let me say, who have been accused of adolescent atribiliousness and girlish cynicism, that any faith that I may have lost in previous unfortunate encounters with my sex on Park Avenue was restored and redoubled by the actresses of *The Women* on Broadway. With me, and among themselves, and in the midst of tedious and gruelling rehearsals, beset by re-writings and cuttings, harassed by much scenery and many quick costume changes, they never failed to display the best in their womanly and professional natures. To use a word that is current in exclusive Park Avenue circles, but has as yet not been vulgarised by the Press, there was not even one wee bitch in the lot.

CLARE BOOTHE

New York City,
February 26, 1937.

Produced by Max Gordon at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, New York City, December 26, 1936, with the following cast (in order of their appearance):

<i>Jane</i>	ANNE TEEMAN
<i>Sylvia (Mrs. Howard Fowler)</i>	ILKA CHASE
<i>Nancy Blake</i>	JANE SEYMOUR
<i>Peggy (Mrs. John Day)</i>	ADRIENNE MARDEN
<i>Edith (Mrs. Phelps Potter)</i>	PHYLLIS POVAH
<i>Mary (Mrs. Stephen Haines)</i>	MARGALO GILLMORE
<i>Mrs. Wagstaff</i>	ETHEL JACKSON
<i>Olga</i>	RUTH HAMMOND
<i>First Hairdresser</i>	MARY STUART
<i>Second Hairdresser</i>	JANE MOORE
<i>Pedicurist</i>	ANN WATSON
<i>Euphie</i>	ELOISE BENNETT
<i>Miss Fordyce</i>	EILEEN BURNS
<i>Little Mary</i>	CHARITA BAUER
<i>Mrs. Morehead</i>	JESSIE BUSLEY
<i>First Saleswoman</i>	DORIS DAY
<i>Second Saleswoman</i>	JEAN RODNEY
<i>Head Saleswoman</i>	LUCILLE FENTON
<i>First Model</i>	BERYL WALLACE
<i>Third Saleswoman</i>	MARTINA THOMAS
<i>Crystal Allen</i>	BETTY LAWFORD
<i>A Fitter</i>	JOY HATHAWAY
<i>Second Model</i>	BEATRICE COLE
<i>Princess Tamara</i>	ARLENE FRANCIS
<i>Exercise Instructress</i>	ANNE HUNTER
<i>Maggie</i>	MARY CECIL
<i>Miss Watts</i>	VIRGILIA CHEW
<i>Miss Trimmerback</i>	MARY MURRAY
<i>A Nurse</i>	LUCILLE FENTON

<i>Lucy</i>	MARJORIE MAIN
<i>Countess de Lage</i>	MARGARET DOUGLASS
<i>Miriam Aarons</i>	AUDREY CHRISTIE
<i>Helene</i>	ARLENE FRANCIS
<i>Sadie</i>	MARJORIE WOOD
<i>Cigarette Girl</i>	LILLIAN NORTON

Directed by ROBERT B. SINCLAIR

Settings designed by JO MIELZINER

Costumes supervised by JOHN HAMBLETON

CHARACTERS

JANE

NANCY (Miss Blake)

PEGGY (Mrs. John Day)

SYLVIA (Mrs. Howard Fowler)

EDITH (Mrs. Phelps Potter)

MARY (Mrs. Stephen Haines)

MRS. WAGSTAFF

FIRST HAIRDRESSER

SECOND HAIRDRESSER

PEDICURIST

OLGA

EUPHIE

A MUD-MASK

INGRID

MISS FORDYCE

LITTLE MARY

MRS. MOREHEAD

FIRST SALESGIRL

SECOND SALESGIRL

HEAD SALESWOMAN (Miss Shapiro)

FIRST MODEL (Miss Myrtle)

SECOND SALESWOMAN

A FITTER

CORSET MODEL

PRINCESS TAMARA

CRYSTAL ALLEN

EXERCISE INSTRUCTRESS

MAGGIE

MISS TRIMMERBACK

MISS WATTS

A NURSE

LUCY

COUNTESS DE LAGE

MIRIAM AARONS

HELENE

FIRST CUTIE

SECOND CUTIE

FIRST SOCIETY WOMAN

SECOND SOCIETY WOMAN

SADIE

CIGARETTE GIRL

A DOWAGER

A DEBUTANTE

A GIRL IN DISTRESS

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

SCENE I : Mary Haines's living-room. A winter afternoon.

SCENE II : A hairdresser's. An afternoon, a few days later.

SCENE III : Mary's boudoir, an hour later.

SCENE IV : A fitting-room. An afternoon, two months later.

ACT II

SCENE I : An exercise room, two weeks later.

SCENE II : Mary's kitchen, midnight, a few days later.

SCENE III : Mary's living-room, a month later.

SCENE IV : A hospital room, a month later.

SCENE V : A Reno hotel room, a few weeks later.

ACT III

SCENE I : Crystal's bathroom, early evening, two years later.

SCENE II : Mary's bedroom, eleven-thirty, the same night.

SCENE III : The Powder Room at the Casino Roof, near midnight, the same night.

ACT I

SCENE I

MARY HAINES's living-room. To-day, Park Avenue living-rooms are decorated with a significant indifference to the fact that ours is still a bi-sexual society. Period peacock-alleys, crystal-hung prima-donna roosts, they reflect the good taste of their mistresses in everything but a consideration of the master's pardonable right to fit in his own home décor. MARY HAINES's living-room is not like that. It would be thought a comfortable room by a man. This, without sacrificing its own subtle, feminine charm. Above the fireplace, there is a charming portrait of MARY's children—a girl of 11, a boy of 5 or 6. Right, a door to the living quarters. Left, another to the hall. Centre, a sofa, armchair, tea-table group; and in the good light from the window, a bridge-table group.

As the curtain rises, JANE, a pretty, and quite correct little Irish-American maid, is arranging the tea-table. Four women are playing bridge in a smoking-car cloud of smoke. They are:

NANCY, who is sharp, but not acid; sleek but not smart; a worldly and yet virginal 35. And her partner—

PEGGY, who is pretty, sweet, 25. PEGGY's character has not, will never quite "jell." And—

SYLVIA, who is glassy, elegant, feline, 34. And her partner—

EDITH, who is a sloppy, expensively dressed (currently, by Lane Bryant) matron of 33 or 34. Indifferent to everything but self, EDITH is incapable of either deliberate maliciousness or spontaneous generosity.

SYLVIA: So I said to Howard, "What do you expect me to do? Stay home and darn your socks? What do we all have money for? Why do we keep servants?"

NANCY: You don't keep them long, God knows—— (*Placing the pack of cards*) Yours, Peggy.

PEGGY: Isn't it Mrs. Potter's? I opened with four spades. (*SYLVIA firmly places the pack before PEGGY. PEGGY wrong again, deals.*)

SYLVIA: Second hand, you did. And went down a thousand. (*Patronisingly*) Peggy, my pet, you can't afford it.

PEGGY: I can too, Sylvia. I'm not a pauper.

SYLVIA: If your bridge doesn't improve, you soon will be.

NANCY: Oh, shut up, Sylvia. She's only playing till Mary comes down.

SYLVIA (*querulously*): Jane, what's Mrs. Haines doing up there?

JANE (*reproachfully*): It's that lingerie woman you sent her, Mrs. Fowler.

SYLVIA: I didn't expect Mrs. Haines to buy anything. I was just trying to get rid of the creature. (*JANE exits.*) Peggy, bid.

PEGGY: Oh, mine? By.

SYLVIA (*looking at PEGGY*): She won't concentrate.

NANCY: She's in love, bless her. After the child's been married as long as you girls, she may be able to concentrate on vital matters like bridge.

SYLVIA (*bored*): Another lecture on the Modern Woman?

NANCY: At the drop of a hat. By.

SYLVIA: I consider myself a perfectly good wife. I've sacrificed a lot for Howard Fowler—two spades. I devote as much time to my children as any of my friends.

NANCY: Except Mary.

SYLVIA: Oh, Mary, of course. Mary is an exception to all of us.

NANCY: Quite right. (*They are waiting for PEGGY again.*) Peggy?

PEGGY (*uncertainly*): Two no trumps? (EDITH rises suddenly. Plainly, she feels squeamish.)

SYLVIA (*wearily*): Edith, not again?

EDITH: I shouldn't have eaten that alligator pear. Morning sickness! I heave the whole darn day. This is positively the last time I go through this lousy business for any man! Four spades. If men had to bear babies, there'd never be——

NANCY: —more than one child in a family. And he'd be a boy. By. (EDITH sinks on the edge of her chair, lays down her cards.)

PEGGY: I wish I were having a baby. We can't afford one now.

SYLVIA: And you'll never be able to, until you know Culbertson. (*Arranging EDITH's cards*) Honestly, Edith! Why didn't you show a slam!

EDITH (*rising hurriedly*): Oh, I have got to unswallow. Wait till you've had three, Peggy. You'd wish you'd never gotten past the bees and flowers. (*Exits precipitously.*)

NANCY (*disgusted*): Poor, frightened, bewildered madonna!

SYLVIA: I'm devoted to Edith Potter. But she does get me down. You'd think she had a hard time. Dr. Briggs says she's like shelling peas. She ought to go through what I went through. Nobody knows!

NANCY: No clubs, partner?

SYLVIA: So when Cynthia came, I had a Caesarian. You should see my stomach—— It's a slam!

NANCY: Are you sure?

SYLVIA: Got the king, Peggy? (PEGGY *obligingly plays the king.*) Thanks, dear, it's a slam. And the rubber. (*Rises, lights a fresh cigarette, goes to arm-chair and perches.*) But I've kept my figure. I must say, I don't blame Phelps Potter for playing around.

PEGGY: Oh, does her husband . . . ?

SYLVIA: Oh, Phelps has made passes at all us girls. I do think it's bad taste for a man to try to make his wife's friends, *especially* when he's bald and fat. I told him once, "Phelps Potter," I said, "the next time you grab at me, I'm going straight to Edith."

NANCY: And did you?

SYLVIA: Certainly not. I wouldn't say anything to hurt Edith for the world. Well, you can't blame the men. But I'll say one thing for Edith. She's not as dumb as *some* of my friends. She's on to her husband.

PEGGY (*bravely*): Do you think *he* is on to her?

SYLVIA: What do you mean?

PEGGY: If he could only hear her talk about him!

SYLVIA: Listen, Peggy, do we know how men talk about us when we're not around?

NANCY: I've heard rumours.

SYLVIA: Exactly. Peggy, you haven't been married long enough to form a private opinion of your husband.

PEGGY: Well, if I had one, I'd keep it to myself. Do you think I'd tell anybody in the world about the quarrels John and I have over money? I'd be too proud! (*Enter EDITH. Goes to tea-table, and gathers a handful of sandwiches.*)

SYLVIA: All over, dear?

EDITH: Oh, that was a false alarm. What happened?

SYLVIA: Only a slam, dear. You do underbid.

EDITH: I'll bet you had me on the pan.

SYLVIA: I never say behind my friends' backs what I won't say to their faces. I said you ought to diet.

EDITH: There's no use dieting in my condition. I've got to wait until I can begin from scratch. Besides, I've got the most wonderful cook. She was with Mary. She said Mary let her go because she was too extravagant. I think this cook Mary has is too, too homey. (*Examines sandwich.*) Watercress. I'd just as soon eat my way across a front lawn.

SYLVIA: I think Mary's gone off terribly this winter. Have you noticed those deep lines, here? (*Draws her finger around her mouth.*)

NANCY: Smiling lines. Tragic, aren't they?

SYLVIA: Perhaps they *are*. Maybe a woman's headed for trouble when she begins to get too—smug.

NANCY: Smug? Don't you mean, happy?

PEGGY: Mr. Haines adores her so!

SYLVIA (*snickering and flashing EDITH a significant glance*): Yes, doesn't he?

NANCY (*coldly*): You just can't bear it, Sylvia, can you?

SYLVIA: Bear what?

NANCY: Mary's happiness. It gets you down.

SYLVIA: Nancy Blake, if there's one thing I can say for myself, I've never been jealous of another woman. Why should I be jealous of Mary?

NANCY: Because she's contented. Contented to be what she is.

SYLVIA: Which is what?

NANCY: A woman.

EDITH: And what, in the name of my revolting condition, are we?

NANCY: Females.

SYLVIA: Really. And what are you, pet?

NANCY: What nature abhors, I'm—a virgin—a frozen asset.

EDITH: I wish I were a virgin again. The only fun I ever had was holding out on Phelps. Nancy, you ought to thank God every night you don't have to make sacrifices for some man.

PEGGY: I wish I could make a little money, writing the way you do, Miss Blake.

NANCY: If you wrote the way I do, that's just what you'd make.

SYLVIA: You're not exactly a popular author, are you, dear?

NANCY: Not with you. Well, good news, Sylvia. My book is finished and once again I'm about to leave your midst.

PEGGY: Oh, I wish we could afford to travel. Where do you go this time, Miss Blake?

NANCY: Africa, shooting.

SYLVIA: Well, darling, I don't blame you. I'd rather face a tiger any day than the sort of things the critics said about your last book. (*Enter MARY. She is a lovely woman in her middle thirties. She is what most of us think our happily married daughters are like. She is carrying several white boxes.*)

MARY: Sorry, girls. (*Teasing*) Sylvia, must you always send me woebegone creatures like that lingerie woman? It's been a very expensive half-hour for me.

PEGGY (*looking at SYLVIA*): For me too, Mrs. Haines.

MARY (*laughing*): Nonsense, Peggy, you were playing for me. Here. (*Hands PEGGY a box.*) Don't open it now. It's a bed-jacket. Or a tea cosy. Or something padded. I wouldn't know. I was crying so hard.

SYLVIA: You didn't believe that woman's sob story?

MARY: Of course I did. (*She really didn't.*) Anyway, she's a lot worse off than you and I. (*Putting down another box*) Edith, wee garments——

EDITH: Darling, how sweet! (*It comes over her again.*) Oh, my God! I'm sick as a cat! (*Sits.*)

SYLVIA: It's a girl. Girls always make you sicker.

NANCY: Even before they're born?

EDITH: I don't care what it is. I've lost everything including my curiosity. Why did God make it take nine months?

NANCY (*helpfully*): It takes an elephant seven years.

EDITH: I wish I were an elephant. I'll look like one anyway before I'm finished. And it would be heaven not to worry for seven years.

MARY (*laughing*): Oh, Edith, it is rather trying. But when it's all over, isn't it the grandest thing in the world to have them?

EDITH: Well, I'd love mine just as much if they came out of cabbages.

NANCY: And I dare say your husband would hardly notice the difference.

JANE (*entering with tea-kettle*): Ma'am, Mr. Haines would like to speak to you on the phone.

MARY: Oh, I can feel what it is in my bones, Jane. (*To the others*) Stephen's going to be kept at the office again to-night. (*Exits.*)

SYLVIA: Give him my love, pet.

MARY (*off-stage*): I will.

SYLVIA (*she never lets anything pass*): Nancy, you couldn't be more wrong about me and Mary.

NANCY: Still rankling?

SYLVIA: Jealous? As a matter of fact, I'm sorry for her.

NANCY: Oh-ho? Why?

SYLVIA (*mysteriously*): Well, for all *we* know she may be living in a fool's paradise with Stephen.

NANCY: Let's check that one for a moment Sylvia. Jane, are the children in?

JANE: Yes, Miss. Just back from the Park (*EDITH rises—SYLVIA, in pantomime, signals her not to leave room. This is not lost on NANCY. For a moment she hesitates at the door.*)

PEGGY: Oh, I'd love to see Mrs. Haines's little girl, Miss Blake—

NANCY (*following PEGGY*): Come along, child. Anyway, it's our turn to go on the pan. But we don't have to worry. You've got a poor man. I've got no man at all. (*They exit.*)

EDITH (*goes to tea-table—pours two cups. JAN empties ash-trays*): This is positively the last time I play bridge with Nancy. She never misses chance to get in a dig. What has a creature like her got but her friends? (*JANE exits, closing door left. SYLVIA stealthily closes door, right.*) The way she kept at you about Mary made me so nervous I thought I'd scream. And in my condition—

SYLVIA: Edith, I've got to tell you! I'll burst I wait!

EDITH: I *knew* you had something ! (*She brings her well-laden plate and tea-cup and settles herself happily beside SYLVIA on the sofa.*)

SYLVIA: You'll die !

EDITH: Mary ?

SYLVIA: No, Stephen. Guess !

EDITH: You couldn't mean . . . ?

SYLVIA (*nodding*): Stephen Haines is cheating on Mary !

EDITH: I don't believe you ; is it true ?

SYLVIA: Wait till you hear. (*Now she is into it.*) You know I go to Michael's for my hair. You ought to go, pet. I despise whoever does yours. Well, there's the most wonderful new manicurist there. (*Shows her scarlet nails.*) Isn't that divine ? Jungle Red——

EDITH: Simply divine. Go on.

SYLVIA: It all came out in the most extraordinary way, this morning. I tried to get you on the phone——

EDITH: I was in the tub. Go on.

SYLVIA: This manicurist, she's marvellous, was doing my nails. I was looking through *Vogue*, the one with Mary in the Beaux Arts Ball costume——

EDITH: —in that white wig that flattered her so much ?

SYLVIA (*nodding*): Well, this manicurist: " Oh, Mrs. Fowler," she said, " is that that Mrs. Haines who's so awfully rich ? "

EDITH: Funny how people like that think people like us are awfully rich.

SYLVIA: I forget what she said next. You know how those creatures are, babble, babble, babble, babble, and never let up for a minute ! When

suddenly she said: "I know the girl who's being kept by Mr. Haines!"

EDITH: No!

SYLVIA: I swear!

EDITH (*thrilled*): Someone *we* know?

SYLVIA: No! That's what's so awful about it. She's a friend of this manicurist. Oh, it wouldn't be so bad if Stephen had picked someone in his own class. But a blonde floosie!

EDITH: But how did Stephen ever meet a girl like that?

SYLVIA: How do men ever meet girls like that? That's what they live for, the rats!

EDITH: But——

SYLVIA: I can't go into all the details, now. They're utterly fantastic——

EDITH: You suppose Mary knows?

SYLVIA: Mary's the kind who couldn't help showing it.

EDITH (*nodding, her mouth full of her third cake*): No self-control. Well, she's bound to find out. If a woman's got any instincts, she feels when her husband's off the reservation. I know *I* would.

SYLVIA: Of course you do, darling. Not Mary—— (*Rises, and walks about the room, wrestling with MARY's sad problem.*) If only there were some way to warn her!

EDITH (*horrified, following her*): Sylvia! You're not going to tell her?

SYLVIA: Certainly not. I'd *die* before I'd be the one to hurt her like that!

EDITH: Couldn't someone shut that manicurist up?

SYLVIA: A good story like that? A lot those girls care whose life they ruin.

EDITH: *Isn't it a dirty trick?*

SYLVIA: *Isn't it foul?* It's not as though only Mary's friends knew. We could keep our mouths shut.

EDITH: I know plenty that I never *breathe* about my friends' husbands!

SYLVIA: So do I! (*They exchange a sudden glance of sharp suspicion.*) Anyway, the whole thing's disgustingly unfair to Mary. I feel like a disloyal skunk, just knowing about it——

EDITH: I adore her——

SYLVIA: I *worship* her. She's my dearest friend in all the world—— (*Voices, off-stage. They sit down at the card-table and begin to play solitaire hastily. Enter NANCY and PEGGY.*)

NANCY: Well, Sylvia, feeling better?

SYLVIA (*innocently*): Meaning what?

NANCY: Must've been choice. You both look so *relaxed*.

SYLVIA: Nancy, were you listening at that door?

PEGGY: Oh, Mrs. Fowler, we were in the nursery. (*MARY enters.*)

SYLVIA (*quickly*): Well, darling, how is Stephen, the old dear? And did you give him my love?

MARY: I did. Stephen's not so well, Sylvia.

SYLVIA: Oh? What's the trouble?

MARY: Nervous indigestion. That's why I have such a plain cook now.

EDITH: Phelps has had indigestion for years. You should hear that man rumble in the night. Like a truck on cobblestones.

SYLVIA: There's nothing—worrying Stephen?

MARY: Oh, no, he's just been working late. He's not coming home to-night. Oh, I wish——

(*Abruptly, with an indulgent laugh*) Well, man's love is of man's life a thing apart, 'tis woman's whole—et cetera.

SYLVIA: Are you sure it's *work*, darling, and not a beautiful blonde?

MARY: Stephen? (*Laughing, and perhaps a little smugly, too*) Oh, Sylvia.

EDITH (*afraid that SYLVIA will go too far*): Sylvia, let's play!

SYLVIA: Stephen's a very attractive man.

MARY: Isn't he? I can't imagine why he hasn't deserted me for some glamorous creature long ago.

NANCY (*alarmed*): Mary, you *do* sound smug.

MARY: Oh, let me be, Nancy. How can you be too sure of what you believe in most?

SYLVIA: I wouldn't be sure of the Apostle Paul. I always tell Howard, "If you ever manage to make a fool of me, I'll deserve what I get."

NANCY: You certainly will. (*Faces SYLVIA squarely.*) Now, Sylvia, let's have it.

SYLVIA: Have what?

NANCY: Just what did you mean when you said Mary was living in a fool's paradise?

MARY: What?

SYLVIA (*angrily*): Nancy, don't be absurd. (*A pause. Then, wriggling out of it*) Oh, Mary, I was just trying to make a typical Nancy Blake wise crack about marriage. I said, "A woman's paradise is always a fool's paradise!"

MARY: That's not bad, is it, Nancy? Well Sylvia, whatever I'm living in, I like it. Nancy cut.

SYLVIA (*examines her nails minutely, suddenly shows them to MARY*): Mary, how do you like that?

NANCY (*not looking*): Too, too adorable.

SYLVIA: You can't imagine how it stays on. I get it at Michael's—you ought to go, Mary!

EDITH (*protestingly*): Oh, Sylvia!—

SYLVIA: A wonderful new manicurist. Olga's her name. She's marvellous.

EDITH: Will you cut, Sylvia?

SYLVIA: Look, Jungle Red.

NANCY: Looks as if you'd been tearing at somebody's throat.

SYLVIA: I'll be damned, Nancy, if I'll let you ride me any more!

MARY: Now, Sylvia, Nancy's just being clever too.

SYLVIA: She takes a crack at everything about me. Even my nails!

MARY (*laughing*): Well, I like it. I really do! It's new and smart. (*Pats her hand.*) Michael's, Olga, Jungle Red? I'll remember that. (*Cuts cards.*) You and I, Sylvia. I feel lucky to-day.

SYLVIA (*with a sweet, pitying smile*): Do you, darling? Well, you know what they say, "Lucky in cards"—

CURTAIN

SCENE II

An afternoon, a few days later. A hairdressing booth in Michael's. An elegantly functional cubby-hole. Right, a recessed mirror in the wall. Left, from the high partition pole, a curtain to the floor. The rear wall is a plain partition. Centre, a swivel hairdressing chair. Above it from an aluminium tree, the hanging thicket of a permanent-wave machine. In the wall, gadgets for curling-irons, electric outlets which

connect with wires to the drying-machine, the hand-drier, the manicurists' table-light, stools for the pedicurist, the manicurist, OLGA.

As the curtain rises, the booth is, to put it mildly, full.

MRS. WAGSTAFF, a fat, elderly woman, is in the chair, undergoing the punishment of a permanent. Wires and clamps, Medusa-like, rise from her head, to the cap of the machine.

OLGA, at her right, is doing her nails. Her fat bare feet rest in the lap of the PEDICURIST. The FIRST HAIRDRESSER cools her steaming locks with a hand-drier. The SECOND HAIRDRESSER, watch in hand, fiddles with the wires, times the operation. When the machine is working, a small, red light glows among the wires.

MRS. WAGSTAFF, apparently inured to public execution, smokes, reads a magazine on her lap, occasionally nibbles a sandwich which the MANICURIST passes her from a tray near her instruments. The drier, whenever it is on, makes a loud noise, drowning out voices, which must be harshly raised above it. Now the drier is on, the voices loud.

MRS. WAGSTAFF: It's burning my neck !

SECOND HAIRDRESSER: Be brave ! One minute more !

MRS. WAGSTAFF (*in pain*): O-o-oo !

FIRST HAIRDRESSER: It's going to be so worth it, Mrs. Wagstaff.

MRS. WAGSTAFF: My ears !

SECOND HAIRDRESSER: Be brave !

MRS. WAGSTAFF: O-o-o-o ! My nerves—— Oo—— my God ! (*To PEDICURIST*) My sandwich—— (*OLGA hands her sandwich.*)

SECOND HAIRDRESSER: Ten seconds. We must suffer to be beautiful. (*The curtain parts; a FIGURE*

in flowing white half-enters. It is, judging by the voice, a woman, but its face is completely obliterated by a mud-mask.)

MUD-MASK: Oh, pardon—I thought I was in here. Why, hello, Mrs. Wagstaff. (*Coyly*) Guess who I am? (*A second FACE appears over this intruder's shoulder. At first, it looks like another mud-mask. It's not. It's the coloured maid, EUPHIE. She clutches the shoulder of the mud-mask.*)

EUPHIE: Mustn't talk, ma'am. You'll crack yo'self. (*Exit MUD-MASK followed by EUPHIE.*)

MRS. WAGSTAFF: Who was it?

FIRST HAIRDRESSER: Mrs. Phipps— (*Switches off the drier. Now they all lower their voices to a normal pitch.*) There, dear, the agony's over. (*They take the permanent clamps off MRS. WAGSTAFF's hair. A drier is on in the next booth. A voice is heard off-stage, screaming above it.*)

VOICE: —so I feel awful. I ate a lobster at the opening of the Ritz— (*The drier goes off.*)

OLGA (*to MRS. WAGSTAFF*): Mrs. Mordie Barnes. She's been in the hospital. It wasn't ptomaine at all. It was a mis—

SECOND HAIRDRESSER: Olga! She'll hear you—

MRS. WAGSTAFF (*thoughtfully*): I think I'll have a mud-mask.

SECOND HAIRDRESSER (*calling outside*): Euphie! Tell the desk Mrs. Wagstaff's working in a mud!

MRS. WAGSTAFF (*enviously*): Mrs. Phipps has such a lovely skin.

FIRST HAIRDRESSER: Not lovelier than yours, Mrs. Wagstaff.

CHORUS (*SECOND HAIRDRESSER, OLGA, PEDICURIST*): Oh, yours is lovely! Why, not nearly as lovely! Lovelier than yours?

MRS. WAGSTAFF (*cooly*): I do think it's rather good for a woman my age.

FIRST HAIRDRESSER: You talk as if you were an old woman, dear.

MRS. WAGSTAFF (*lying*): I'm forty-two.

SECOND HAIRDRESSER: Mustn't tell anyone. You don't look a day over thirty-five!

CHORUS (SECOND HAIRDRESSER, PEDICURIST, OLGA): Why, no one would believe it! Why, not a day! Oh, you don't look it!

SECOND HAIRDRESSER: —now you've gotten so much slimmer!

MRS. WAGSTAFF: I have slimmed down, haven't I?

CHORUS (PEDICURIST, OLGA, FIRST HAIRDRESSER): Oh, thin as a shadow! Why, terribly thin! Oh, just right, now!

MRS. WAGSTAFF (*admiring her nail polish*): That's lovely.

OLGA: Jungle Red. Everybody loves it. Do you know Mrs. Howard Fowler?

PEDICURIST (*rising, gathering up her things*): Don't put your stockings on yet, Mrs. Wagstaff, you'll smear your beautiful big toe— (*Exits.*)

OLGA: They say Mr. Fowler made a fortune in some stock. But one of the ladies Mrs. Fowler sent in was telling me Mr. Fowler does like to drink! Only the other day—

FIRST HAIRDRESSER (*sharply*): We're ready now, Mrs. Wagstaff. (*Gets MRS. WAGSTAFF up.*) We'll unwind you in the shampoo. (*Calling*) Euphie!

SECOND HAIRDRESSER (*taking MRS. WAGSTAFF to door*): This way, dear. How does your permanent feel? And it's going to look lovely, too— (*SECOND HAIRDRESSER herds MRS. WAGSTAFF out of the booth, MRS. WAGSTAFF walking on her heels,*

her toes still wadded with cotton. Enter EUPHIE, who, during the ensuing dialogue, cleans up the debris on the floor of the booth.)

OLGA: That old gasoline truck! Fifty-two if she's a day!

FIRST HAIRDRESSER: One more permanent and she won't have a hair left on her head.

OLGA: There's plenty on her upper lip.

EUPHIE: She sho' does shed, don't she?

OLGA: Any woman who's fool enough to marry a man ten years younger! Know what a client told me? Her husband's a pansy! (HAIRDRESSER exits followed by OLGA.)

SECOND HAIRDRESSER (*entering*): Ready?

EUPHIE: Yes, ma'am. (*The SECOND HAIRDRESSER holds back the curtain.*)

MARY (*off-stage*): So I woke up this morning and decided for no reason at all to change the way—(*She enters, followed by NANCY*)—I do my hair. (*Exit EUPHIE.*)

SECOND HAIRDRESSER: Mr. Michaels will be ten minutes, ma'am. Anyone in particular for your manicure?

MARY: Who does Mrs. Fowler's nails?

HAIRDRESSER: Olga. I'll see. (*Exits.*)

NANCY: God, I'd love to do Mrs. Fowler's nails, right down to the wrist, with a nice big buzz saw.

MARY: Sylvia's all right. She's a good friend underneath.

NANCY: Underneath what?

MARY: Nancy, you don't humour your friends enough.

NANCY: So that's the big idea coming here? You're humouring Sylvia?

MARY: Oh, you did hurt her. I had it all over again at lunch. (*She catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror.*) Nancy, am I getting old?

NANCY: Who put that in your head? Sylvia?

MARY: Tell me the truth.

NANCY: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and twaddle to that effect.

MARY: But it's such a scary feeling when you see those little wrinkles creeping in.

NANCY: Time's little mice.

MARY: And that first gleam of white in your hair. It's the way you'd feel about autumn if you knew there'd never be another spring——

NANCY (*abruptly*): There's only one tragedy for a woman.

MARY: Growing old?

NANCY: Losing her man.

MARY: That's why we're all so afraid of growing old.

NANCY: Are you afraid?

MARY: Well, I was very pretty when I was young. I never thought about it twice then. Now I know it's why Stephen loved me.

NANCY: Smart girl.

MARY: Now I think about it all the time.

NANCY: Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds. Shakespeare.

MARY: Well, he told me, on my birthday, I'd always look the same to him.

NANCY: Nice present. No jewels?

MARY: It rained that day. He brought me a bottle of perfume called "Summer Rain."

NANCY: How many ounces?

MARY: Nancy, you've never been in love.

NANCY : Says who ?

MARY (*surprised*) : Have you ?

NANCY : Yes.

MARY : You never told me.

NANCY : You never asked—— (*Wistfully*)
Neither did *he*. (*OLGA enters with fresh bowl of water.*) Here, innocent. (*Gives a book to MARY.*)
The book my readers everywhere have been waiting for with such marked apathy.

MARY : *All the Dead Ladies* ?

NANCY : Originally called, *From the Silence of the Womb*. My publisher thought that would make too much noise.

MARY : What's it about ? (*OLGA begins to file MARY's nails.*)

NANCY : Women I dislike : " Ladies "——

MARY : Oh, Nancy !

OLGA : Don't soak it yet. (*Taking MARY's hand out of the water.*)

NANCY : No good ? Too bad. It's a parting shot. I'm off.

MARY : Off ?

NANCY : Africa.

MARY : But not to-day ?

NANCY : I knew if I told you you'd scurry around and do things. A party. Steamer baskets of sour fruit. Not nearly as sour as the witty cables your girl friends would send me—— So don't move. No tears. For my sake——just soak it ? Good-bye, Mary——

MARY : Good-bye, Nancy. I'll miss you.

NANCY : I doubt it. Practically nobody ever misses a clever woman. (*Exits.*)

OLGA : Funny, isn't she ?

MARY: She's a darling.

OLGA (*filing MARY's nails*): She's a writer? How do those writers think up those plots? I guess the plot part's not so hard to think up as the end. I guess anybody's life'd make a interesting plot if it had a interesting end—Mrs. Fowler sent you in? (MARY, *absorbed in her book, nods.*) She's sent me three clients this week. Know Mrs. Herbert Parrish that was Mrs. Malcolm Leeds? Well, Mrs. Parrish was telling me herself about her divorce. Seems Mr. Parrish came home one night with lipstick on his undershirt. Said he always explained everything before. But *that* was something he just wasn't going to try to explain. Know Mrs. Potter? She's awful pregnant——

MARY (*she wants to read*): I know.

OLGA: Soak it, please. (*Puts MARY's hand in water. Begins on other hand.*) Know Mrs. Stephen Haines?

MARY: What? Why, yes, I——

OLGA: I guess Mrs. Fowler's told you about that! Mrs. Fowler feels awfully sorry for her.

MARY (*laughing*): Oh, she does! Well, I don't. I——

OLGA: You would if you knew this girl.

MARY: What girl?

OLGA: This Crystal Allen.

MARY: Crystal Allen?

OLGA: Yes, you know. The girl who's living with Mr. Haines. (MARY *starts violently.*) Don't you like the file? Mrs. Potter says it sets her unborn child's teeth on edge.

MARY (*indignant*): Whoever told you such a thing?

OLGA: Oh, I thought you knew. Didn't Mrs. Fowler——?

MARY: No——

OLGA: Then you will be interested. You see, Crystal Allen is a friend of mine. She's really a terrible man-trap. Soak it, please. (MARY, *dazed, puts her hand in the dish.*) She's behind the perfume counter at Saks'. So was I before I got fi—left. That's how she met him.

MARY: Stephen Haines?

OLGA: Yeah. It was a couple a months ago. Us girls wasn't busy. It was an awful rainy day, I remember. So this gentleman walks up to the counter. He was the serious type, nice-looking, but kind of thin on top. Well, Crystal nabs him. "I want some perfume," he says. "May I awsk what type of woman for?" Crystal says, very Ritzy. That didn't mean a thing. She was going to sell him Summer Rain, our feature anyway. "Is she young?" Crystal says. "No," he says, sort of embarrassed. "Is she the glamorous type?" Crystal says. "No, thank God," he says. "Thank God?" Crystal says and bats her eyes. She's got those eyes which run up and down a man like a searchlight. Well, she puts perfume on her palm and in the crook of her arm for him to smell. So he got to smelling around and I guess he liked it. Because we heard him tell her his name, which one of the girls recognised from Cholly Knickerbocker's column—Gee, you're nervous—Well, it was after that I left. I wouldn't of thought no more about it. But a couple of weeks ago I stopped by where Crystal lives to say hello. And the landlady says she'd moved to the kind of house where she could entertain her gentleman friend—"What gentleman friend?" I says. "Why, that Mr. Haines that she's had up in her room all hours of the night," the landlady says—Did I hurt? (MARY *draws her hand away.*) One coat, or two? (*Picks up a red bottle.*)

MARY: None. (*Rises and goes to the chair, where she has left her purse.*)

OLGA: But I thought that's what you came for ?
All Mrs. Fowler's friends——

MARY: I think I've gotten what all Mrs. Fowler's friends came for. (*Puts coin on the table.*)

OLGA (*picks up coin*): Oh, thanks—— Well, good-bye. I'll tell her you were in, Mrs. —— ?

MARY: Mrs. Stephen Haines.

OLGA: Mrs. —— ? Oh, gee, gee ! Gee, Mrs. Haines—I'm sorry ! Oh, isn't there something I can do ?

MARY: Stop telling that story !

OLGA: Oh, sure, sure, I will !

MARY: And please, don't tell anyone—(*her voice breaks*)—that you told it to me——

OLGA: Oh, I won't, gee, I promise ! Gee, that would be kind of humiliating for you ! (*Defensively*) But in a way, Mrs. Haines, I'm kinda glad you know. Crystal's a terrible girl—I mean, she's terribly clever. And she's terribly pretty, Mrs. Haines—I mean, if I was you I wouldn't waste no time getting Mr. Haines away from her —(*MARY turns abruptly away*)—I mean, now you know, Mrs. Haines !

[*OLGA eyes the coin in her hand distastefully, suddenly puts it down on the table and exits. MARY, alone, stares blankly in the mirror, then suddenly focusing on her image, leans forward, searching her face between her trembling hands. A drier goes on in the next booth. A shrill voice rises above its drone.*]

VOICE: —Not too hot ! My sinus ! So *she* said: "I wouldn't want anybody in the world to know," and *I* said: "My dear, you know you can trust *me* !"

SCENE III

An hour later. MARY's boudoir. Charming, of course. A door to bedroom, right. A door to the hall, left. A chaise-longue; next to it, a table with books, flowers, a telephone. A dressing-table.

As the curtain rises, MARY is discovered on the chaise-longue, trying to read. JANE enters from the hall. She is upset about something. She keeps daubing at her eyes.

MARY: Tea, Jane?

JANE: It's coming, ma'am.

MARY: My mother will be here in a few minutes. A cup for her.

JANE: Yes, ma'am. (*Sniffing*) Ma'am——

MARY: And tell cook, please, dinner on time. We're going to the theatre. Mr. Haines likes to be there for the curtain. I'll wear my old black, Jane.

JANE (*looking nervously at the door behind her*): Yes, ma'am.

MARY: No, I'll wear my new blue, Jane.

JANE: Ma'am, it's Cook. She wants to see you. (*Defensively*) It's about *me*. She says I——

MARY: Later, Jane.

JANE: Don't you believe a word she says, ma'am. It's all his fault.

MARY (*aware of JANE's distress for the first time*): Whose fault?

JANE: Her husband's. Ford's.

MARY (*surprised*): What's the matter with Ford? He's a very good butler.

JANE: Oh, he does his work, ma'am. But you don't know how he is in the pantry. Always kidding around with us girls. He don't mean any

harm, but Cook—— (*Enter COOK abruptly with MARY's tea-tray. She is a fat, kind woman, with a strong Scandinavian accent. At the moment she is very mad.*)

COOK: Afternoon, ma'am. (*Glaring at JANE*) I'd like to talk to you alone, ma'am.

JANE: I told you, it isn't my fault.

COOK: You led him on !

JANE: I didn't. (*Bursting into tears*) I've been with Mrs. Haines seven years. She knows I never make trouble downstairs. (*Exits to hall.*)

MARY: Yes, Ingrid ?

COOK: Ma'am, you're the nicest I ever had. But I go. I got to get Ford away from that bad girl.

MARY (*very firmly*): Jane is not a bad girl.

COOK (*bursts into tears*): Oh, course she ain't. He was always like that ! Sometimes I could die, for the shame !

MARY (*kindly*): I'll send him away. You can stay.

COOK (*more soberly*): No, I don't do that, ma'am.

MARY: I'll give you a hundred dollars. That's more than half of what you make together.

COOK: Thank you, ma'am. We both go.

MARY: Is that sensible ?

COOK: No. It's plain dumb.

MARY: Then why ?

COOK (*she pauses, rocking from foot to foot*): I guess nobody understand. Sure it was no good to marry him. My mother told me he's a lady-killer. Don't marry them, she said. His wife is the lady he kills. Oh, he's terrible. But except for women he's a good man. He always says, "Ingrid, you take the money. You manage good." Oh, he don't want nobody but me for his wife ! That's an awful big thing, ma'am.

MARY: Is that the thing that really matters?

COOK: With women like us, yes, ma'am—
You give us references? (MARY nods.) And don't
say nothing about his ways?

MARY: I won't.

COOK (*moving to the door*): Black bean soup, a
fricassee, fried sweets and apple pie for dinner,
ma'am— (*She opens the door. JANE has been
eavesdropping.*)

COOK (*in a low, fierce voice*): Slut! (*Exit COOK.*)

JANE (*entering with extra cup on tray*): Did you hear
what she called me, Mrs. Haines?

MARY: Please, Jane.

JANE (*cheerfully*): I'd rather be that any day than
have some man make a fool of me! (*Enter MISS
FORDYCE. She is a raw-boned, capable English
spinster of thirty-two.*)

MISS FORDYCE: May I see you, Mrs. Haines?

MARY: Of course, Miss Fordyce.

MISS FORDYCE: It's about little Mary—
Really, Mrs. Haines, you'll have to talk to your
child. She's just smacked her little brother,
hard. Pure temper.

MARY: What did little Stevie do to her, Miss
Fordyce?

MISS FORDYCE: Well, you see, it happened while
I was down getting my tea. When I came up,
she'd had such a tantrum, she'd made herself ill.
She positively refuses to discuss the incident with
me. But I'm quite sure the dear boy hadn't done
a thing.

MARY: You're very apt to take the boy's side,
Miss Fordyce.

MISS FORDYCE: Not at all. But in England, Mrs.
Haines, our girls are not so wretchedly spoiled.

After all, this is a man's world. The sooner our girls are taught to accept the fact *graciously*—

MARY (*gently*): Send her in to me, Miss Fordyce. (*Exit MISS FORDYCE.*) Oh, Jane, I don't understand it. Miss Fordyce really prefers Mary, but she insists we all make a little god of Stevie. (*Exits to bedroom, leaving the door open.*)

JANE: Them English ones always hold out for the boys. But they say since the war, ma'am, there's six women over there to every man. Competition is something fierce! Over here, you can treat the men the way they deserve—men aren't so scarce. (*Enter LITTLE MARY. She is a broad-browed, thoughtful, healthy little girl, physically well developed for her age.*)

LITTLE MARY: Where's Mother?

JANE: You're going to catch it. Smacking your little brother. (*Mimicking MISS FORDYCE*) Such a dear, sweet little lad—shame. (*LITTLE MARY does not answer.*) I'll bet you wish you were Mother's girl, instead of Daddy's girl to-day, don't you? (*LITTLE MARY doesn't answer.*) What's the matter, the cat got your tongue? (*Enter MARY, wearing a negligée.*)

MARY: Hello, darling—aren't you going to kiss me? (*LITTLE MARY doesn't move.*) What red eyes!

LITTLE MARY: I was mad. I threw up. When you throw up, doesn't it make you cry?

MARY (*smiling*): Stevie tease you? (*LITTLE MARY, embarrassed, looks at JANE. JANE sniggers, takes the hint and goes out.*) Well, darling?

LITTLE MARY: Mother, I don't know how to begin.

MARY (*sitting on the chaise-longue, and putting out her hand*): Come here. (*LITTLE MARY doesn't budge.*) Would you rather wait until to-night and tell Dad?

LITTLE MARY (*horrified*): Oh, Mother, I couldn't tell him! (*Fiercely*) And I'd be killed to death before I'd tell skinny old Miss Fordyce—

MARY: That's not the way for my dear little girl to talk.

LITTLE MARY (*setting her jaw*): I don't want to be a dear little girl. (*She suddenly rushes to her mother's outstretched arms in tears.*) Oh, Mother dear, Mother dear!

MARY: Baby, what?

LITTLE MARY: What brother said!

MARY: What did he say, the wretched boy?

LITTLE MARY (*disentangling herself*): He said I had bumps!

MARY: Bumps? You don't mean mumps?

LITTLE MARY: No, bumps. He said I was covered with disgusting bumps!

MARY (*alarmed*): Mary, where?

LITTLE MARY (*touching her hips and breasts with delicate, ashamed finger-tips*): Here and here!

MARY: Oh— (*Controlling her relieved laughter, and drawing her daughter to her side*) Of course you have bumps, darling. Very pretty little bumps. And you have them because—you're a little girl.

LITTLE MARY (*wailing*): But, Mother dear, I don't want to be a little girl. I hate girls! They're so silly, and they tattle, tattle—

MARY: Not really, Mary.

LITTLE MARY: Yes, Mother, I know. Oh, Mother, what *fun* is there to be a lady? What can a lady do?

MARY (*cheerfully*): These days, darling, ladies do all the things men do. They fly aeroplanes

across the ocean, they go into politics and business——

LITTLE MARY: *You don't, Mother.*

MARY: Perhaps I'm happier doing just what I do.

LITTLE MARY: What do you do, Mother?

MARY: Take care of you and Stevie and Dad.

LITTLE MARY: You don't, Mother. Miss Fordyce and the servants do.

MARY (*teasing*): I see. I'm not needed around here.

LITTLE MARY (*hugging her*): Oh, Mother, I don't mean that. It wouldn't be any fun at all without *you*. But, Mother, even when the ladies *do* do things, they stop it when they get the love-dovies.

MARY: The what?

LITTLE MARY: Like in the movies, Mother. Ladies always end up so *silly*. (*Disgusted*) Lovey-dovey, lovey-dovey all the time!

MARY: Darling, you're too young to understand——

LITTLE MARY: But, Mother——

MARY: "But Mother, but Mother!" There's one thing a woman can do, no man can do.

LITTLE MARY (*eagerly*): What?

MARY: Have a child. (*Tenderly*) Like you.

LITTLE MARY: Oh, that! Everybody knows that. But is that any fun, Mother dear?

MARY: Fun? No. But it is—joy. (*Hugging her*) Of a very special kind.

LITTLE MARY (*squirming away*): Well, it's never sounded specially exciting to me—I love you, Mother. But I bet you anything you like, Daddy

has more fun than you ! (*She slips away from MARY. Then sees her mother's dispirited face, turns and kisses her warmly.*) Oh, I'm sorry, Mother. But you just don't understand ! (*A pause.*) Am I to be punished, Mother ?

MARY (*she is thinking about something else*) : What do you think ?

LITTLE MARY : I smacked him awful hard—shall I punish myself ?

MARY : It will have to be pretty bad.

LITTLE MARY (*solemnly*) : Then I won't go down to breakfast with Daddy to-morrow, or the next day—O.K., Mother ?

MARY : O.K. (*LITTLE MARY walks, crestfallen, to the door as JANE enters. LITTLE MARY sticks out her tongue.*)

LITTLE MARY : There's my tongue ! So what ? (*Exits skipping.*)

JANE (*laughing*) : She never lets anybody get the best of her, does she, Mrs. Haines ?

MARY : My poor baby. She doesn't want to be a woman, Jane.

JANE : Who does ?

MARY : Somehow, I've never minded it, Jane. (*Enter MRS. MOREHEAD. She is a bourgeois aristocrat of fifty-five. MARY rises, kisses her.*)

MRS. MOREHEAD : Hello, child. Afternoon, Jane.

JANE : Afternoon, Mrs. Morehead. (*Exits to bedroom.*)

MARY : Mother, dear ! (*She walks slowly to the dressing-table.*)

MRS. MOREHEAD (*cheerfully*) : Well, what's wrong ? (*Sits.*)

MARY (*turning*) : How did you know something's wrong ?

MRS. MOREHEAD: Your voice on the phone. Is it Stephen?

MARY: How did you know?

MRS. MOREHEAD: You sent for *Mother*. So it must be he. (*A pause.*)

MARY: I don't know how to begin, Mother.

MRS. MOREHEAD (*delighted to find that her instincts were correct*): It's a woman! Who is she?

MARY: Her name is Crystal Allen. She—she's a salesgirl at Saks'. (*Her mother's cheerful and practical manner discourages tears, so she begins to cream and tonic her face instead.*)

MRS. MOREHEAD: She's young and pretty, I suppose.

MARY: Well, yes. (*Defensively*) But common.

MRS. MOREHEAD (*soothingly*): Of course—Stephen told you?

MARY: No. I—I found out—this afternoon.

MRS. MOREHEAD: How far has it gone?

MARY: He's known her about three months.

MRS. MOREHEAD: Does Stephen know you know?

MARY (*shaking her head*): I—I wanted to speak to you first. (*The tears come anyway.*) Oh, Mother dear, what am I going to say to him?

MRS. MOREHEAD: *Nothing.*

MARY: Nothing? (*Enter JANE with the new dress.*)

JANE: I'll give it a touch with the iron.

MARY: Look, Schaparelli— (*JANE holds dress up.*) It's rather trying, though, one of those tight skirts with a flared tunic—

MRS. MOREHEAD: Personally, I always thought you looked best in things not too extreme. (*Exit JANE.*)

MARY: But, Mother, you don't really mean I should say nothing?

MRS. MOREHEAD: I do.

MARY: Oh, but Mother——

MRS. MOREHEAD: My dear, I felt the same way twenty years ago.

MARY: Not Father?

MRS. MOREHEAD: Mary, in many ways your father was an exceptional man. (*Philosophically*) That, unfortunately, was not one of them.

MARY: Did you say nothing?

MRS. MOREHEAD: Nothing. I had a wise mother, too. Listen, dear, this is not a new story. It comes to most wives.

MARY: But Stephen——

MRS. MOREHEAD: Stephen is a man. He's been married twelve years——

MARY: You mean, he's tired of me!

MRS. MOREHEAD: Stop crying. You'll make your nose red.

MARY: I'm not crying. (*Patting tonic on her face*) 'This stuff stings.

MRS. MOREHEAD (*going to her*): Stephen's tired of himself. Tired of feeling the same things in himself year after year. Time comes when every man's got to feel something new—when he's got to feel young again, just because he's growing old. Women are just the same. But when *we* get that way we change our hair dress. Or get a new cook. Or redecorate the house from stem to stern. But a man can't do over his office, or fire his secretary. Not even change the style of his hair. And the urge usually hits him hardest just when he's beginning to lose his hair. No, dear, a man has only one escape from his old self: to see a different self—in the mirror of some woman's eyes.

MARY: But, Mother——

MRS. MOREHEAD: This girl probably means no more to him than that new dress means to you.

MARY: But, Mother——

MRS. MOREHEAD: " But Mother, but Mother ! " He's not giving anything to her that belongs to you, or you would have felt that yourself long ago.

MARY (*bewildered*): Oh, I always thought I would. I love him so much.

MRS. MOREHEAD: And he loves you, baby. (*Drawing MARY beside her on the chaise-longue*) Now listen to me: Go away somewhere for a month or two. There's nothing like a good dose of another woman to make a man appreciate his wife. Mother knows !

MARY: But, there's never been a lie between us before.

MRS. MOREHEAD: You mean, there's never been a *silence* between you before. Well, it's about time. Keeping still, when you *ache* to talk, is about the only sacrifice spoiled women like us ever have to make.

MARY: But, I'd forgive him——

MRS. MOREHEAD: Forgive him ? (*Impatiently*) For what ? For being a man ? Accuse him, and you'll never get a chance to forgive him. He'd have to justify himself——

MARY: How can he !

MRS. MOREHEAD (*sighing*): He can't and he *can*. Don't make him try. Either way you'd lose him. And remember, dear, it's being together at the *end* that really matters. (*Rising*) One more piece of motherly advice: Don't confide in your girl friends !

MARY: I think they all know.

MRS. MOREHEAD: They think you don't ?

(MARY *nods*.) Leave it that way. If you let them advise you, they'll see to it, in the name of friendship, that you lose your husband and your home. I'm an old woman, dear, and I know my sex. (*Moving to the door*) I'm going right down this minute and get our tickets.

MARY: Our—tickets?

MRS. MOREHEAD: You're taking me to Bermuda, dear. My throat's been awfully bad. I haven't wanted to worry you, but my doctor says—

MARY: Oh, Mother darling! Thank you!

MRS. MOREHEAD: Don't thank me, dear. It's rather—*nice* to have you need Mother again. (*Exits. The telephone rings. MARY answers it.*)

MARY: Yes?—Oh, Stephen—Yes, dear?—(*Distressed*) Oh, Stephen! Oh, no—I'm not angry. It's—it's just that I wanted to see the play. Yes, I can get Mother. Stephen, will you be very—late? (*It's a bit of a struggle, but she manages a cheerful voice.*) Oh, it's—all right. Have a good time. Of course, I know it's just business—No, dear—I won't wait up—Stephen, I love— (*A click. The other end has hung up.*) JANE enters. MARY turns her back. Her face would belie the calmness of her voice.) Jane—the children and I will have dinner alone—

CURTAIN

SCENE IV

Two months later. A dressmaker's shop. We see two fitting booths, the same in appointment: triplex pier glasses, dress-racks, smoking-stands, two small chairs. They are divided by a mirrored partition. At the rear of each booth, a curtain and a door, off a corridor, which leads to "the floor."

As the curtain rises the booth on the left is empty. The other booth is cluttered with dresses. Two SALESGIRLS are loading them over their arms.

FIRST GIRL (*with vivid resentment against a customer who has just departed*): Well, now we can put them all back again. Makes you drag out everything in the damn' store, and doesn't even buy a brassière!

SECOND GIRL: And that's the kind who always needs one.

FIRST GIRL: This isn't her type. That isn't her type. I'd like to tell her what her type is.

SECOND GIRL: I'd like to know.

FIRST GIRL: It's the type that nobody gives a damn about! Gee, I'd like to work in a men's shop once. What can a man try on?

SECOND GIRL: Ever see a man try on hats? What they go through, you'd think a head was something peculiar. (*Both girls exit. FIRST SALESWOMAN enters the booth on the right, hereafter called "Mary's Booth."*)

FIRST SALESWOMAN: Miss Myrtle, step in here a moment. (*A handsome wench, in a slinky negligée, enters.*)

MODEL: Yes, Miss Shapiro.

FIRST SALESWOMAN: If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times, when you're modeling that dress, your stomach must lead. If you walk like this (*pantomimes*) you take away all the seduction. This is seduction! (*Shows MISS MYRTLE her rather unconvincing conception of a seductive walk.*)

MODEL: I'll try, Miss Shapiro. (*Tearfully*) But if you had my appendix!

FIRST SALESWOMAN: Well, Miss Myrtle, you can take your choice: You will either lose your job

or lose your appendix ! (*Exit MODEL. In right booth, hereafter called "Crystal's Booth," enter SECOND SALESWOMAN.*)

SECOND SALESWOMAN (*to the FIRST and SECOND GIRLS who have returned for another load of dresses*) : Quickly, please. I have a client waiting. (*SECOND GIRL exits with last of clothes as enter CRYSTAL, followed by SALESWOMAN. THIRD SALESWOMAN is seen crossing corridor from right to left.*)

[*MARY's Booth.*

FIRST SALESWOMAN (*giving little white slip to the SALESWOMAN who passes*) : Bring down Mrs. Haines's fittings. (*Exits, leaving booth empty.*)

[*CRYSTAL's Booth.*

SECOND SALESWOMAN : Will you open a charge ?

CRYSTAL (*taking off her gloves and hat*) : Please.

SECOND SALESWOMAN : May I have the name ?

CRYSTAL (*she is quite self-assured*) : Allen. Miss Crystal Allen. The Hotel Waverly.

SECOND SALESWOMAN : May I have your other charges ? Saks, Bergdorf, Cartier—— ?

CRYSTAL (*putting it on*) : Oh, I'll be opening those, in the next few days——

SECOND SALESWOMAN : Then may I have your bank ?

CRYSTAL : I've no chequing account either, at the moment. (*Enter MARY in her booth, with FITTER and FIRST SALESWOMAN, who carries her try-on gown. During the following scene MARY undresses, gets into gay evening gown, fits.*)

FIRST SALESWOMAN (*to MARY, as they enter*) : Shall we show the things that came in while you were away ?

MARY : Please. But I'd like to see some younger things than I usually wear.

[*CRYSTAL's Booth.*

SECOND SALESWOMAN: I'm sorry, Miss Allen. But we *must* ask for one business reference——

CRYSTAL (*lightly; she was prepared for this*): Oh, of course. Mr. Stephen Haines, 40 Wall. He's an old friend of my family.

SECOND SALESWOMAN (*writing*): That will do. Mrs. Haines is a very good client of ours.

CRYSTAL (*unprepared for that*): Oh?

SECOND SALESWOMAN: Will you try on now, or finish seeing the collection?

CRYSTAL: By the way, I've never met Mrs. Haines.

SECOND SALESWOMAN: She's lovely.

CRYSTAL: So—I'd rather you didn't mention to her, that I gave her husband as reference. (*Beguiling*) Do you mind?

SECOND SALESWOMAN (*with a faint smile*): Oh, of course not, Miss Allen. (*Indulgently*) We understand.

CRYSTAL (*angrily*): Do you! What do you understand?

SECOND SALESWOMAN (*flustered*): I mean——

CRYSTAL (*very injured*): Never mind.

SECOND SALESWOMAN: Please, I hope you don't think I meant——

CRYSTAL (*laughing and very charming again*): Of course not. Oh, it's dreadful, living in a strange city alone. You have to be so careful not to do anything people can misconstrue. You see, I don't know Mrs. Haines yet. So I'd hate to get off on the wrong foot, before I've met her *socially*.

SECOND SALESWOMAN (*she sounds convinced*): Naturally. Women are funny about little things like that.

[MARY's Booth. Enter SYLVIA.

SYLVIA: Yoo-hoo! May I come in?

MARY (*not at all pleased to see her*): Hello, Sylvia.

[In CRYSTAL's Booth.

SECOND SALESWOMAN: What are you most interested in, Miss Allen, evening gowns?

CRYSTAL: Until I—I organise my social life—I won't have much use for evening gowns.

SECOND SALESWOMAN: I'll show you some smart daytime things. (*Deliberately toneless*) And we have very *exciting* negligées— (*They exit.*)

[MARY's Booth.

SYLVIA *circles around* MARY, *appraising her fitting with a critical eye.*

MARY: Oh, sit down, Sylvia.

SYLVIA (*to the fitter*): I don't like that underslung line. (*Demonstrating on MARY*) It cuts her across the fanny. Makes her look positively duck-bottomed.

MARY (*pulling away*): It's so tight, Mrs. Fowler can't sit down.

FIRST SALESWOMAN: Mrs. Fowler, shall I see if your fittings are ready?

SYLVIA: They'll call me.

MARY (*pointing to dress* FIRST SALESWOMAN *has over her arm*): Have you seen that?

FIRST SALESWOMAN (*holding up dress*): It's a lovely shape on. It doesn't look like a thing in the hand. (*Hands dress to someone outside and calls.*) Show this model, girls.

SYLVIA (*settling in a chair and smoking a cigarette*): So you had a marvellous time in Bermuda.

MARY: I had a good rest.

SYLVIA (*with unconscious humour*): Howard wants me to take a world cruise. By the way, dear, how is Stephen?

MARY: Splendid. (*Smiling, and very glad to be able to tell SYLVIA this*) He's not nearly so busy. He hasn't spent an evening—in the office, since I've come home. (*Enter FIRST MODEL in an elaborate negligée. MARY shakes her head, very practical.*) Pretty, but I never need a thing like that——

SYLVIA: Of course you don't. A hot little number, for intimate afternoons. (*Exit FIRST MODEL.*) Howard says nobody's seen Stephen in the Club, in the afternoon, for months——

MARY (*the thought flashes across her mind that STEPHEN could, of course, have revised his extra-marital schedule, from an evening to an afternoon one, but she quickly dismisses it; STEPHEN has never let anything interfere with his hours down town*): Don't worry so much about Stephen, Sylvia. He's my concern. (*Enter SECOND MODEL in a corset. She is prettily fashioned from head to toe. She does a great deal for the wisp of lace she wears. It does nothing that nature didn't do better for her.*)

SECOND MODEL: This is our new one-piece lace foundation garment. (*Pirouettes.*) Zips up the back, and no bones. (*She exits.*)

SYLVIA: Just that uplift, Mary, you need. I always said you'd regret nursing. Look at me. I don't think there's another girl our age who has bazooms like mine. I've taken care of them. Ice water every morning, camphor at night.

MARY: Doesn't it smell like an old fur coat? (*PRINCESS TAMARA passes in the corridor.*)

SYLVIA: Who cares?

MARY: Howard?

SYLVIA (*laughing harshly*): Howard!

FIRST SALESWOMAN (*calling out door*): Princess Tamara, show here. (*Enter PRINCESS TAMARA in a very extreme evening gown. She is Russian, regal, soignée.*)

MARY: Oh, Tamara, how lovely !

TAMARA: You must have it. Stephen would be amazed.

MARY: He certainly would. It's too extreme for me.

SYLVIA (*rises*): And you really haven't the figure. (*Yanks at gown.*) Tamara, you wear it wrong. I saw it in *Vogue*. (*Jerks.*) Off here, and down there.

TAMARA (*slapping SYLVIA's hand down*): Stop mauling me !

FIRST SALESWOMAN: Princess !

TAMARA: What do you know how to wear clothes ?

SYLVIA: *I* am not a model, Tamara, but no one disputes how *I* wear clothes !

TAMARA: No one has mistaken you for Mrs. Harrison Williams yet !

FIRST SALESWOMAN: Princess Tamara, you'd better apologise.

MARY (*to SALESWOMAN*): It's just professional jealousy. They're really good friends !

SYLVIA (*maliciously*): You mean Tamara and Howard are friends.

TAMARA (*disgusted at the thought*): Do you accuse me of flirting with *your* husband ?

SYLVIA (*pleasantly*): Go as far as you can, Tamara ! If I know Howard, you're wasting valuable time.

TAMARA (*very angry*): Perhaps I am. But perhaps somebody else is not ! (*The SALESWOMAN gives*

her an angry shove.) You are riding for a fall-off, Sylvia dear ! (*Exit TAMARA angrily, followed by SALESWOMAN.*)

SYLVIA : Did you get that innuendo ? I'd like to see Howard Fowler put anything over on me. Oh, I've always hated that girl, exploiting her title the way she does ! (*CRYSTAL and SECOND SALESWOMAN enter CRYSTAL's Booth.*)

SECOND SALESWOMAN (*calling down the corridor*) : Princess Tamara, show in here, to Miss Allen. (*MARY's SALESWOMAN enters MARY's Booth, picking up the call.*)

FIRST SALESWOMAN : Girls, show in Number 3 to Miss Allen.

SYLVIA (*alert*) : Did you say Miss Allen ?

FIRST SALESWOMAN : Yes.

SYLVIA : Not—Crystal Allen ?

FIRST SALESWOMAN : Why, yes—I just saw her on the floor. She's so attractive I asked her name.

SYLVIA (*watching MARY closely*) : Oh, so Crystal Allen gets her things here ? (*MARY sits down suddenly.*)

FIRST SALESWOMAN : She's a new client—Why, Mrs. Haines, are you ill ? (*MARY has caught SYLVIA's eye in the mirror. SYLVIA knows now that MARY knows.*)

MARY : No, no. I'm just tired. (*TAMARA enters CRYSTAL's Booth.*)

FITTER : We've kept you standing too long—

FIRST SALESWOMAN : I'll get you a glass of sherry. (*Exit MARY's FITTER and SALESWOMAN. SYLVIA closes door.*)

[*CRYSTAL's Booth.*

CRYSTAL (*admiring TAMARA's extreme evening*

gown) : I'm going to have that, if I have to wear it for breakfast.

SECOND SALESWOMAN : Send it in here, Princess. (TAMARA *exits.*)

[MARY's *Booth.*

SYLVIA : Mary, you do know ! (*Deeply sympathetic*) Why didn't you confide in me ?

MARY : Sylvia, go away.

SYLVIA (*fiercely*) : Stephen is a louse. Spending your money on a girl like that.

MARY : Sylvia, please mind your own affairs.

SYLVIA : She's already made a fool of you before all your friends. And don't you think the sales-girls know who gets the bills ?

MARY (*distraught*) : I don't care, I tell you. I don't care !

SYLVIA : Oh, yes, you do. (*Pointing to MARY's stricken face in the mirror*) Don't be an ostrich, Mary. (*A pause.*) Go in there.

MARY : Go in there ? I'm going home. (*She rises and begins to dress.*)

FIRST SALESWOMAN (*half enters*) : Mrs. Haines's sherry—

SYLVIA (*taking it from her, and closing the door in her face*) : All right.

SYLVIA : You've caught her cold. It's *your* chance to humiliate her. Just say a few *quiet* words. Tell her you'll make Stephen's life *hell* until he gives her up.

MARY : Stephen will give her up when he's tired of her.

SYLVIA : When he's tired of her ? Look where she was six months ago. Look where she is now.

MARY : Stephen's not in love with that girl.

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SYLVIA: Maybe not. But you don't know women like that when they get hold of a man.

MARY: Sylvia, please let me decide what is best for me, and my home.

[CRYSTAL, in her booth, has been undressing, admiring herself as she does so in the mirror. Now she slips into a "really exciting" negligée.

SYLVIA: Well, she may be a perfectly marvelous influence for Stephen, but she's not going to do your children any good.

MARY (turning to her): What do you mean?

SYLVIA (mysteriously): Never mind.

MARY (going to her): Tell me!

SYLVIA: Far be it from me to tell you things you don't care to hear. I've known this all along. (Nobly) Have I uttered?

MARY (violently): What have my children to do with this?

SYLVIA (after all, MARY's asking for it): It was while you were away. Edith saw them. Stephen, and that tramp, and your children—together, lunching in the Park.

MARY: It's not true!

SYLVIA: Why would Edith lie? She said they were having a hilarious time. Little Stevie was eating his lunch sitting on that woman's lap. She was kissing him between every bite. When I heard that, I was positively heart-sick, dear! (Sees she has scored. Celebrates by tossing down MARY's sherry.)

[CRYSTAL's Booth.

CRYSTAL: Oh, go get that evening gown. This thing bores me.

SECOND SALESWOMAN: Right away, Miss Allen. (Exits.)

[MARY's Booth.

SYLVIA: But, as you say, dear, it's your affair, not mine. (*Goes to the door, looking very hurt that MARY has refused her good advice.*) No doubt that girl will make a perfectly good *step-mamma* for your children! (*Exits. MARY, now dressed, is alone. She stares at the partition which separates her from that still unmeasured enemy to her well-ordered domesticity, "the other woman." Her common sense dictates she should go home, but now she violently experiences the ache to talk. She struggles against it, then goes, bitterly determined, to the door. Exits. A second later, there is a knock on CRYSTAL's door. CRYSTAL is alone.*)

CRYSTAL: Come in! (*Enter MARY. She closes door.*) I beg your pardon?

MARY: I am—Mrs. Stephen Haines.

CRYSTAL (*her poise is admirable*): Sorry—I don't think I know you!

MARY: Please don't pretend.

CRYSTAL: So Stephen finally told you?

MARY: No. I found out. (*SECOND SALESWOMAN half enters.*)

CRYSTAL: Stay out of here! (*Exit SALESWOMAN.*)

MARY: I've known about you from the beginning.

CRYSTAL: Well, that's news.

MARY: I kept still.

CRYSTAL: Very smart of you. (*SECOND SALESWOMAN pantomimes down the corridor, to another girl to join her. Enters MARY's booth. One by one, during the rest of this scene, the FITTERS, SALESWOMEN and MODELS tiptoe into MARY's booth and plaster their ears against the partition.*)

MARY: No, not smart. I wanted to spare Stephen. But you've gone a little too far—you've been seeing my children. I won't have you touching my children!

CRYSTAL: For God's sake, don't get hysterical. What do I care about your children? I'm sick of hearing about them.

MARY: You won't have to hear about them any more. When Stephen realises how humiliating all this has been to me, he'll give you up instantly.

CRYSTAL: Says who? The dog in the manger?

MARY: That's all I have to say.

CRYSTAL: That's plenty.

MARY (*more calmly*): Stephen would have grown tired of you anyway.

CRYSTAL (*nastily*): Speaking from your *own* experience? Well, he's not tired of me yet, Mrs. Haines.

MARY (*contemptuous*): Stephen is just amusing himself with you.

CRYSTAL: And he's amusing himself plenty.

MARY: You're very hard.

CRYSTAL: I can be soft—on the *right* occasions. What do you expect me to do? Burst into tears and beg you to forgive me?

MARY: I found exactly what I expected!

CRYSTAL: That goes double!

MARY (*turning to the door*): You'll have to make other plans, Miss Allen.

CRYSTAL (*going to her*): Listen, I'm taking my marching orders from Stephen.

MARY: Stephen doesn't love you.

CRYSTAL: He's doing the best he can in the circumstances.

MARY: He couldn't love a girl like you.

CRYSTAL: What do you think we've been doing for the past six months? Crossword puzzles?

What have you got to kick about? You've got everything that matters. The name, the position, the money——

MARY (*losing control of herself again*): Nothing matters to me but Stephen——!

CRYSTAL: Oh, can the sob-stuff, Mrs. Haines. You don't think this is the first time Stephen's ever cheated? Listen, I'd break up your smug little roost if I could. I have just as much right as you have to sit in a tub of butter. But I don't stand a chance!

MARY: I'm glad you know it.

CRYSTAL: Well, don't think it's just because he's *fond* of you——

MARY: *Fond*?

CRYSTAL: You're not what's stopping him—you're just an old *habit* with him. It's just those brats he's afraid of losing. If he weren't such a sentimental fool about those kids, he'd have walked out on *you* years ago.

MARY (*fiercely*): That's not true!

CRYSTAL: Oh, yes, it is. I'm telling you a few plain truths you won't get from Stephen.

MARY: Stephen's always told me the truth——!

CRYSTAL (*maliciously*): Well, look at the record. (*A pause.*) Listen, Stephen's satisfied with this arrangement. So don't force any issues, unless you want plenty of trouble.

MARY: You've made it impossible for me to do anything else——!

CRYSTAL (*rather pleased*): Have I?

MARY: You haven't played fair——!

CRYSTAL: Where would any of us get if we played fair?

MARY: Where do you hope to get?

CRYSTAL: Right where *you* are, Mrs. Haines!

MARY: You're very confident.

CRYSTAL: The longer you stay in here, the more confident I get. Saint or no saint, Mrs. Haines, you are a hell of a *dull woman*!

MARY (*stares at her wide-eyed at the horrid thought that this may be the truth. She refuses to meet the challenge. She equivocates*): By your standards, I probably am. I—— (*Suddenly ashamed that she has allowed herself to be put so pathetically on the defensive*) Oh, why am I standing here talking to you? This is something for Stephen and me to settle! (*Exits.*)

CRYSTAL (*slamming the door after her*): Oh, what the hell!

[MARY's Booth.

SECOND SALESWOMAN: So that's what she calls meeting Mrs. Haines *socially*.

FIRST SALESGIRL: Gee, I feel sorry for Mrs. Haines. She's so nice.

NEGLIGÉE MODEL: She should have kept her mouth shut. Now she's in the soup.

FIRST SALESWOMAN: It's a terrible mistake to lay down ultimatums to a man.

FIRST MODEL: Allen's smart. She's fixed it so anything Mr. Haines says is going to sound wrong.

FIRST SALESGIRL: She'll get him sure.

FIRST FITTER: Look at that body. She's got him now.

SECOND SALESGIRL: You can't trust any man. *That's all they want.*

CORSET MODEL (*plaintively, her hands on her lovely hips*): What else have we got to give?

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

Two weeks later. A small exercise room in a beauty-salon. Right, a mirrored wall. Rear, a door. Left, a cabinet victrola beneath an open window. On the floor, a wadded pink satin mat. As the curtain rises, SYLVIA, in a pair of shorts, is prone on the mat, describing lackadaisical arcs with her legs, to the sensuous rhythm of a tango record. The INSTRUCTRESS, a bright, pretty girl, in a pink silk bathing suit, stands above her, drilling her in a carefully cultured voice. Until the cue "Stretch," the INSTRUCTRESS's lines are spoken through SYLVIA's prattle, which she is determined, for the honour of the salon, to ignore, and, if possible, to discourage. From the word "up," this is a hopeless task.

INSTRUCTRESS: Up—over—up—down. Up—stretch—up—together. Up—stretch—up—

SYLVIA: Of course, my sympathies are for Mrs. Haines. They always are for a woman against a man—

INSTRUCTRESS (*louder*): Up—over—up—down. Up—stretch—up—together. Up—

SYLVIA: But she did behave like an awful idiot—

INSTRUCTRESS: Stretch—up—together. Please don't try to talk, Mrs. Fowler.

SYLVIA: But you know how some women are when they lose their heads—

INSTRUCTRESS (*grimly*): Stretch—up—together—up—

SYLVIA: They do things they regret all their lives—

INSTRUCTRESS (*grabs SYLVIA's languid limb and gives it a corrective yank*): Ster-retch !

SYLVIA: Ouch, my scars !

INSTRUCTRESS (*callously*): This is very good for adhesions. Up——

SYLVIA (*resolutely inert*): It's got me down.

INSTRUCTRESS: Rest. (SYLVIA *groans her relief*.) And relax your diaphragm muscles, Mrs. Fowler (*bitterly*) if you can. (*Goes to the victrola, changes the record for a fox-trot.*)

SYLVIA: Of course, I do wish Mrs. Haines would make up her mind if she's going to get a divorce. It's terrible on all her friends, not knowing. Naturally, you can't ask them anywhere——

INSTRUCTRESS: Of course not. Now, on your side. (SYLVIA *rolls to her side, reclining on her elbow.*) Ready? Up—down—up—down—— (*Snaps her fingers. SYLVIA flaps a limp leg up, down——*) Don't bend the knee——

SYLVIA (*thoughtfully*): Of course, for the children's sake, I think Mrs. Haines ought to stay. (*Piously*) I know I would. (*Her knees look bent, not to say broken.*)

INSTRUCTRESS (*imploring*): Don't crook it, please.

SYLVIA: And she ought not to have faced Mr. Haines with the issue. When a man's got himself in that deep he has to have time to taper it off——

INSTRUCTRESS (*straightening out SYLVIA's offending member with considerable force*): Thigh in, not out.

SYLVIA (*pained, but undaunted*): But Mrs. Haines never listens to any of her friends. She is a very peculiar woman.

INSTRUCTRESS: She must be. Now, please—up—down—up—down——

SYLVIA (*redoubling her efforts, and her errors*): Oh, I tell everybody whatever she wants to do is the right thing. I've got to be loyal to Mrs. Haines, you know. . . . Oh, I'm simply exhausted. (*Flops over, flat on her stomach, panting.*)

INSTRUCTRESS: Then suppose you try something simple—like crawling up the wall? (SYLVIA *lifts a martyred face. The INSTRUCTRESS changes the record for a waltz.*)

SYLVIA (*scrambling to her feet*): What I go through to keep my figure! Lord, it infuriates me at dinner parties when some fat lazy man asks, "What do you do with yourself all day, Mrs. Fowler?" (*Sits alongside the rear wall.*)

INSTRUCTRESS: You rotate on your buttocks. (SYLVIA *rotates, then lies back, her knees drawn up to her chin, the soles of her feet against the wall.*) Arms flat. Now you crawl slowly up the wall.

SYLVIA (*crawling*): I wish you wouldn't say that. It makes me feel like vermin——

INSTRUCTRESS (*kneeling beside her*): Don't talk.

SYLVIA: There's a couple of people I'd like to exterminate, too——

INSTRUCTRESS: Let's reverse the action. (SYLVIA *crawls down, as PEGGY enters in an exercise suit. The INSTRUCTRESS brightens.*)

INSTRUCTRESS: How do you do, Mrs. Day? (*To SYLVIA*) Down slowly——

PEGGY (*gaily*): How do you do? Hello, Sylvia.

SYLVIA: You're late again, Peggy.

PEGGY (*crestfallen*): I'm sorry.

SYLVIA (*sitting up*): After all, dear, I am paying for this course.

PEGGY: You know I'm grateful, Sylvia——

SYLVIA: Well. don't cry about it. It's only fifty dollars.

PEGGY: That's a lot to me——

SYLVIA (*sweetly*): To you, or just to your husband, dear?

INSTRUCTRESS: Please, ladies. Let us begin with posture. (SYLVIA rises.) A lady always enters a room erect.

SYLVIA: Lots of my friends exit horizontally. (PEGGY and SYLVIA go to the mirrored wall, stand with their backs to it.)

INSTRUCTRESS: Now—knees apart. Sit on the wall. (*They sit on imaginary seats.*) Relax. (*They bend forward from the waist, finger-tips brushing the floor.*) Now, roll slowly up the wall . . . pressing each little vertebra against the wall as hard as you can . . . shoulders back, and where they belong. Heads back. Mrs. Fowler, lift yourself behind the ears. Pretend you're just a silly little puppet dangling on a string. Chin up. (*She places her hand at the level of PEGGY's straining chin.*) No, Mrs. Day, your chin is resting comfortably on a little table. Elbows bent—up on your toes—arms out—shove with the small of your back—you're off! (SYLVIA and PEGGY, side by side, mince across the room.)

PEGGY (*whispering*): Oh, Sylvia, why do you always insinuate that John is practically a—miser?

INSTRUCTRESS (*she refers to PEGGY's swaying hips*): Tuck under!

SYLVIA: You have your own little income, Peggy. And what do you do with it? You give it to John—

INSTRUCTRESS: Now, back, please! (*They mince backwards across the room.*)

PEGGY (*staunchly*): John makes so little—

INSTRUCTRESS (*she refers to SYLVIA's relaxed tummy*): Steady centre control!

SYLVIA: Peggy, you're robbing John of his manly sense of responsibility. You're turning him into a gigolo. A little money of her own she

lets no man touch is the only protection a woman has. (*They are against the mirror again.*)

INSTRUCTRESS: Now, are you both the way you were when you left the wall?

SYLVIA (*brightly*): Well, I am.

INSTRUCTRESS: No, Mrs. Fowler, you're not. (*She imitates SYLVIA's posture, showing how SYLVIA's posterior protrudes, against the dictates of fashion, if not of nature.*) Not this, Mrs. Fowler— ("Bumps") That! (*She leads SYLVIA forward.*) Try it, please. (*Facing one another, they do an elegant pair of "bumps."*) Now, relax on the mat.

[*This piece of business defies description, but to do the best one can: the girls stand side by side, arms straight above their heads. At the INSTRUCTRESS's count of "one," each drops a hand, limp, from the wrist. At "two," the other hand drops, then their heads fall upon their breasts, their arms flap to their sides, their waists cave in, their knees buckle under, and they swoon, or crumble like boneless things, to the mat.*]

INSTRUCTRESS (*she has changed the record*): Now, ready? Bend—stretch, you know. Begin— (*They do another leg exercise on the mat.*) Bend—stretch—bend—down—plenty of pull on the hamstrings, please! Bend—stretch—bend—down— (*Enter EDITH. She is draped in a white sheet. Her head is bound in a white towel. Her face is undergoing a "tie-up," that is, she wears broad white straps under her chin and across her forehead. She appears very distressed.*)

EDITH: Oh, Sylvia! Hello, Peggy—

SYLVIA (*sitting up*): Why, Edith, what are you doing up here?

EDITH: Having a facial, downstairs. Oh, Sylvia, I'm so glad you're here. I've done the most awful thing, I—

INSTRUCTRESS: We're right in the middle of our exercises, Mrs. Potter—

SYLVIA (*to INSTRUCTRESS*): Will you tell them outside—I want my paraffin bath now? There's a dear.

INSTRUCTRESS: But, Mrs. Fowler——

SYLVIA (*cajoling*): I'm simply exhausted.

INSTRUCTRESS: You've hardly moved a muscle.

SYLVIA (*with elaborate patience*): Look, whose carcase is this? Yours or mine?

INSTRUCTRESS: It's yours, Mrs. Fowler, but I'm paid to exercise it.

SYLVIA: You talk like a horse-trainer.

INSTRUCTRESS: Well, Mrs. Fowler, you're getting warm. (*Exits.*)

EDITH: I've done the most *ghastly* thing. Move over. (*PEGGY and SYLVIA move over; EDITH plumps between them on the mat.*) But it wasn't until I got here, in the middle of my facial, that I realised it—I could bite my tongue off when I think of it——

SYLVIA: Well, what is it, Edith?

EDITH: I was lunching with Frances Jones, and——

SYLVIA: Edith Potter, I know exactly what you're going to say!

EDITH: I forgot she——

SYLVIA: You forgot she's Dolly de Peyster.

EDITH: But I never read her awful column——

SYLVIA (*fiercely*): You told her something about me? What did you tell her?

EDITH: Oh, darling, you know I never give *you* away. (*Remorsefully*) I—I—told her all about Stephen and Mary——

SYLVIA (*relieved*): Oh! That!

EDITH: It wasn't until the middle of my facial——

PEGGY: Oh, Edith ! It will be in all those dreadful tabloids !

EDITH: I know—I've been racking my brains to recall what I said—I think I told her that when Mary walked into the fitting-room, she yanked the ermine coat off the Allen girl——

SYLVIA: You didn't !

EDITH: Well, I don't know whether I said ermine or *sable*—but I know I told her that Mary *smacked* the Allen girl !

PEGGY: Edith !

EDITH: Well, that's what Sylvia told me !

SYLVIA: I didn't !

EDITH: You did, too !

SYLVIA (*hurt*): Anyway, I didn't expect you to tell it to a cheap reporter——

EDITH: Well, it doesn't really make much difference. The divorce is practically settled——

SYLVIA (*eagerly*): Who says so ?

EDITH: You did !

SYLVIA (*patiently*): I said, Mary couldn't broadcast her domestic difficulties, and not expect them to wind up in a scandal.

PEGGY: Mary didn't broadcast them !

SYLVIA: Who did ?

PEGGY: *You* did. You—you're all making it impossible for her to do anything now but get a divorce !

SYLVIA: You flatter us. We didn't realise how much influence we had on our friends' lives !

PEGGY: Everybody calling her up, telling her how badly she's been treated——

SYLVIA: As a matter of fact, I told her she'd make a great mistake. What has any woman got to gain by a divorce? No matter how much he gives her, she won't have what they have together. And you know as well as I do, he'd marry that girl. What he's spent on her, he'd have to, to protect his investment. (*Sorrowfully*) But, I have as much influence on Mary as I have on you, Peggy. (*The INSTRUCTRESS re-enters.*)

INSTRUCTRESS: The paraffin bath is ready, Mrs. Fowler.

SYLVIA (*rises*): Well, don't worry, Edith, I'll give de Peyster a ring. I can fix it.

EDITH: How?

SYLVIA (*graciously*): Oh, I'll tell her you were lying.

EDITH: You'll do no such thing!

SYLVIA (*shrugging*): Then let the story ride. It will be forgotten to-morrow. You know the awful things they printed about—what's her name?—before she jumped out the window? Why, I can't even remember her name, so who cares, Edith? (*Exits.*)

INSTRUCTRESS: Mrs. Potter, you come right back where you belong.

EDITH: Why, you'd think this was a boarding school!

INSTRUCTRESS: But, Mrs. Potter, it's such a foolish waste of money—

EDITH: Listen, relaxing is part of my facial.

INSTRUCTRESS (*coolly*): Then you should relax completely, Mrs. Potter, from the chin up. (*Exits.*)

EDITH: Honestly, the class feeling you run into these days! (*Struggles to her feet.*) I'm so tired of paying creatures like that to insult me—

PEGGY (*going to her*): Edith! Let's call Mary up and warn her!

EDITH: About what?

PEGGY: The newspapers!

EDITH: My dear, how could we do that, without involving Sylvia——

PEGGY: But it's *her* fault—— Oh, she's such a dreadful woman!

EDITH: Oh, she can't help it, Peggy. It's just her tough luck she wasn't born deaf and dumb. But what can we do about it? She's always gotten away with murder. Why, she's been having an affair for a year with that young customers' man in Howard's office.

PEGGY (*shocked*): Edith!

EDITH: Right under Howard's nose! But Howard doesn't care! So what business is it of yours or mine? (*Earnestly*) Peggy, take a tip from me—keep out of other women's troubles. I've never had a fight with a girl friend in all my life. Why? I hear no evil, I see no evil, I speak no evil!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A few days later.

MARY'S pantry, midnight. Left, a swinging door, to the kitchen. Rear, a sink under a curtained window. A small, built-in refrigerator. Centre, a table, two chairs.

As the curtain rises, JANE, the maid, and MAGGIE, the new cook, are having a midnight snack. MAGGIE, a buxom, middle-aged woman, wears a wrapper and felt bedroom slippers.

JANE (*folding a tabloid newspaper which she has been reading to MAGGIE*): So he says, "All you can do with a story like that, is live it down, Mary."

MAGGIE: I told you they'd begin all over. Once a thing like that is out between a married couple, they've got to fight it out. Depends which they get sick of first, each other, or the argument.

JANE: It's enough to make you lose your faith in marriage.

MAGGIE: Whose faith in marriage?

JANE: You don't believe in marriage?

MAGGIE: Sure I do. For women. (*Sighs.*) But it's the sons of Adam they got to marry. Go on.

JANE: Well, finally he said to the madam, "I gave her up, didn't I? And I was a swine, about the way I did it." How do you suppose he did it, Maggie?

MAGGIE: Maybe he just said, "Scram, the wife is on to us."

JANE: Well, the madam didn't believe him. She says, "Stephen, you really ain't seen her?"

MAGGIE: He lied in his teeth——

JANE: Oh, the way he said it, I kind of believed him. But the madam says, "Oh, but can I ever trust you again?"

MAGGIE: You can't trust none of 'em no further than I can kick this lemon pie.

JANE: Oh, it was terrible sad. He said, "Mary, dear Mary, Mary, dear Mary, Mary——"

MAGGIE: Dear Mary. But it ain't exactly convincing.

JANE: Then, I guess he tried to kiss her. Because she says, "Please don't. I'll never be able to kiss

you again, without thinking of her in your arms."

MAGGIE (*appreciatively*): Just like in the movies—imagine him taking up with a girl like that.

JANE: He was telling the madam: She's a virgin.

MAGGIE: She *is*? Then what's all the rumpus about?

JANE: Oh, she ain't a virgin now. She was.

MAGGIE: So was Mac West—once.

JANE: He told the madam he'd been faithful for twelve years.

MAGGIE: Well, that's something these days, that beats flying the Atlantic. Did the madam believe him?

JANE: She said, "How do I know you've been faithful?"

MAGGIE: She don't.

JANE: But the way he said it—

MAGGIE: Listen, if they lay off six months, they feel themselves busting out all over with haloes.

JANE: Anyway, he says this girl was really a nice girl. So sweet and interested in him and all. And how it happened one night, unexpected, in her room—

MAGGIE: Did he think it was going to happen in Roxy's?

JANE: He said she wouldn't take nothing from him for months—

MAGGIE: Only her education. Oh, that one knew her onions. She certainly played him for a sucker.

JANE: That's what the madam said. She said, "Stephen, can't you see that girl's only interested in you for your money?"

MAGGIE: Tch, tch, tch. I'll bet that made him sore. A man don't like to be told no woman but his wife is fool enough to love him. It drives 'em nutty.

JANE: Did it! "Mary, I told you what kind of girl she is," he says. You know—I just told you——

MAGGIE: I had her number. You didn't convey no information.

JANE: Well, then they both got sore.

MAGGIE (*rises, goes out for coffee*): I knew it.

JANE: So, he began to tell her all over, what a good husband he'd been. And how hard he'd worked for her and the kids. And she kept interrupting with what a good wife she'd been and how proud she was of him. Then they began to exaggerate themselves——

MAGGIE (*enters with coffee-pot*): Listen, anybody that's ever been married knows that line backwards and forwards. What happened?

JANE: Well, somewhere in there the madam says, "Stephen, you do want a divorce. Only you ain't got the courage to ask it." And he says, "Oh, my God, no I don't, Mary. Haven't I told you?" And she says, "But you don't love me!" And he says, "But oh, my God, Mary, I'm awful *fond* of you." And she says, very icy, "Fond, fond? Is that all?" And he says, "No, Mary, there's the children." Maggie, that's the thing I don't understand. Why does she get so mad every time he says they've got to consider the children? If children ain't the point of being married, what is?

MAGGIE: A woman don't want to be told she's being kept on just to run a kindergarten. (*Goes to the ice box for a bottle of cream.*)

JANE: Well, the madam says, "Stephen, I want to keep the children out of this. I haven't used

the children. I ain't asked you to sacrifice yourself for the children." Maggie, that's where he got so terrible mad. He says, "But why, in God's name, Mary? You knew about us all along. Why did you wait until now to make a fool of me?"

MAGGIE: As if he needed her help.

JANE: So then, suddenly she says, in a awful low voice, "Stephen, oh, Stephen, we can't go on like this. It ain't worthy of what we been to each other!" And he says, "Oh, no, it's not, Mary!"

MAGGIE: Quite a actress, ain't you?

JANE: My boy friend says I got eyes like Claudette Colbert's.

MAGGIE: Did he ever say anything about your legs? Have a cup of coffee. (*Pours coffee.*)

JANE: That's when the madam says what you could have knocked me down with a feather! The madam says, "Stephen, I want a divorce. Yes, Stephen, I want a divorce!"

MAGGIE: Tch. Tch. Abdicating!

JANE: Well, Maggie, you could have knocked him down with a feather!

MAGGIE (*waving coffee-pot*): I'd like to knock him down with this.

JANE: "My God! Mary," he says, "you don't mean it!" So she says, in a funny voice, "Yes, I do. You've killed my love for you, Stephen."

MAGGIE: He's just simple-minded enough to believe that.

JANE: So he says, "I don't blame you. My God, how can I blame you?"

MAGGIE: My God, he can't!

JANE: So then she said it was all over, because it

was only the children he minded losing. She said that made their marriage a mockery.

MAGGIE: A mockery?

JANE: Something funny.

MAGGIE: I ain't going to die laughing.

JANE: He said she was talking nonsense. He said she was just upset on account of this story in the papers. He said what else could she expect if she was going to spill her troubles to a lot of gabby women? He said she should go to bed until she could think things over. He was going out for a breath of fresh air.

MAGGIE: The old hat trick.

JANE: So the madam says, "You're going to see that girl." And he says, "Oh, for God's sake, Mary, one minute you never want to see me again, the next I can't even go out for a airing!"

MAGGIE: You oughtn't to let none of 'em out *except on a leash*.

JANE: And she says, "Are you going to see her, or ain't you?" And he says, "Well, what difference does it make, if you're going to divorce me?" And she says, "It don't make no difference to *you*, I guess. Please go, Stephen. And don't come back *ever*." (*Begins to cry.*)

MAGGIE (*impatiently*): Yes?

JANE: I didn't hear his last words. Because naturally, when he said he was going, I scooted down the hall. But I heard her call, "Stephen!" And he stops on the landing and says, "Yes, Mary?" and she says, "Nothing. Just don't slam the front door—the servants will hear you!" So I came down here. Oh, Maggie, what's going to happen?

MAGGIE: She's going to get a divorce.

JANE: Oh, dear. I'm so sad for her.

MAGGIE: I ain't.

JANE: What?

MAGGIE: She's indulging a pride she ain't entitled to. Marriage is a business of taking care of a man and rearing his children. It ain't meant to be no perpetual honeymoon. How long would any husband last if he was supposed to go on acting for ever like a red-hot Clark Gable? What's the difference if he don't love her?

JANE: How can you say that, Maggie?

MAGGIE: That don't let her off her obligation to keep him from making a fool of himself, does it?

JANE: Do you think he'll marry that girl?

MAGGIE: When a man's got the habit of supporting some woman, he just don't feel natural unless he's doing it.

JANE: But he told the madam marrying her was the furthest thing from his mind.

MAGGIE: It don't matter what he's got in his mind. It's what those two women got in theirs will settle the matter.

JANE: But the madam says it's up to *him*. She said, "You love her, or you love me, Stephen."

MAGGIE: So what did he say to that?

JANE: Nothing for a long time. Just walked up and down—up and down—up and—

MAGGIE: He was thinking. Tch—tch. The first man who can think up a good explanation how he can be in love with his wife *and* another woman, is going to win that prize they're always giving out in Sweden!

SCENE III

A month later.

MARY's living-room. *The room is now denuded of pictures, books, vases, etc. The rug is rolled up. The curtains and chairs are covered with slips.*

As the curtain rises, MARY, dressed for travelling, is pacing up and down. MRS. MOREHEAD, dressed for the street, watches her from the sofa.

MRS. MOREHEAD: What time does your train go?

MARY (*looking at her wrist watch*): An hour. His secretary ought to be here. I never knew there could be so many papers to sign.

MRS. MOREHEAD: You showed everything to your lawyers——

MARY: They always say the same thing! I'm getting a "raw deal"——

MRS. MOREHEAD (*alarmed*): But, Mary——

MARY: Oh, I know it's not true. Stephen's been very generous.

MRS. MOREHEAD: Oh, I wouldn't say that. If Stephen is a rich man now, he owes it largely to you.

MARY: Stephen would have gotten where he is, with or without me.

MRS. MOREHEAD: He didn't have a penny when you married him.

MARY: Mother, are you trying to make me bitter, too?

MRS. MOREHEAD (*helplessly*): I'm sure I don't know what to say. If I sympathise with Stephen, you accuse me of taking his side. And when I sympathise with you, I'm making you bitter. The thing for me to do is keep still. (*There is a*

pause. Then, emphatically) You're both making a terrible mistake !

MARY : Mother, please !

MRS. MOREHEAD : But the children, Mary. The children——

MARY : What good will it do them to be brought up in a home full of quarrelling and suspicion ? They'll be better off just with me.

MRS. MOREHEAD : No, they won't. A child needs both its parents in one home.

MARY : A home without love ?

MRS. MOREHEAD : He's terribly fond of you——

MARY : Mother, don't use that word ! Oh, Mother, please. Every argument goes round in circles. And, it's too late now——

MRS. MOREHEAD : It's never too late when you love. Mary, why don't you call this thing off ? I'm sure that's what Stephen's waiting for.

MARY (*bitterly*) : Is it ? He hasn't made any sign of it to me. Isn't he the one to come to me ?

MRS. MOREHEAD : You're the one, Mary, who insisted on the divorce.

MARY : But don't you see ; if he hadn't wanted it, he'd have fought me——

MRS. MOREHEAD : Stephen's not the fighting kind.

MARY : Neither am I.

MRS. MOREHEAD : Damn these modern laws !

MARY : Mother !

MRS. MOREHEAD : Damn them, I say ! Fifty years ago, when women couldn't get divorces, they made the best of situations like this. And sometimes, out of situations like this they made very good things indeed ! (*Enter JANE, right.*)

JANE : Mr. Haines's secretary, ma'am.

MRS. MOREHEAD: Tell her to come in. (*Exit JANE.*) Now, go bathe your eyes. Don't let that adding-machine see you like this. And don't be long. Remember, you have one more unpleasant task.

MARY: Mary?

MRS. MOREHEAD: The child must be told.

MARY (*miserably, and a little guiltily*): I have been putting it off. Because——

MRS. MOREHEAD: Because you hope at the last minute a miracle will keep you from making a mess of your life. Have you thought: Stephen might marry that girl?

MARY (*very confident*): He won't do that.

MRS. MOREHEAD: What makes you so sure?

MARY: Because, deep down, Stephen does love me—— But he won't find it out, until I've—— really gone away—— (*At the door*) You'll take good care of the children, Mother? And make them write to me to Reno, once a week? And please, Mother, don't spoil them so. (*Exits left.*)

MRS. MOREHEAD: Gracious! You'd think I'd never raised children of my own! (*Enter Miss WATTS and Miss TRIMMERBACK, right. They are very tailored, plain girls. Miss WATTS, the older and the plainer of the two, carries a brief-case.*) How do you do, Miss Watts?

MISS WATTS: How do you do, Mrs. Morehead? This is Miss Trimmerback from our office.

MISS TRIMMERBACK: How do you do?

MISS WATTS: She's a notary. We have some papers for Mrs. Haines to sign.

MRS. MOREHEAD: Anything I can do?

MISS WATTS: The children will be with you? (*MRS. MOREHEAD nods.*) Any incidental bills, Mrs. Morehead, send to the office. But you

understand, bills arriving after the divorce will be assumed by Mrs. Haines under the terms of the settlement.

MRS. MOREHEAD: Mrs. Haines will be with you in a minute. Please don't bother her with unnecessary details. She's—she's pressed for time. (*Exits right.*)

MISS TRIMMERBACK: Gee, don't you feel sorry for Mrs. Haines?

MISS WATTS (*bitterly*): I don't feel sorry for any woman who thinks the world owes her breakfast in bed.

MISS TRIMMERBACK: You don't like her.

MISS WATTS: Oh, she never interfered at the office.

MISS TRIMMERBACK: Maybe that's why he's been a success.

MISS WATTS: He'd have gotten further without her. Everything big that came up, he was too cautious, because of her and the kids. (*Opens the brief-case, takes out papers and pen, arranges the papers, for signing, on the table.*) Well, thank heavens it's almost over. He and I can go back to work. (*Sits.*)

MISS TRIMMERBACK: What about Allen?

MISS WATTS (*guardedly*): What about her?

MISS TRIMMERBACK: Is he going to marry her?

MISS WATTS: I don't butt into his private affairs. Oh, I hold no brief for Allen. But I must say knowing *her* gave him a new interest in his work. Before her, he was certainly going stale. That had me worried.

MISS TRIMMERBACK (*sinking on the sofa*): Well, she's lucky, I'll say.

MISS WATTS: Oh?

MISS TRIMMERBACK: I wish I could get a man to

foot my bills. I'm sick and tired, cooking my own breakfast, sloshing through the rain at 8 a.m., working like a dog. For what? Independence? A lot of independence you have on a woman's wages. I'd chuck it like that for a decent, or an indecent, home.

MISS WATTS: I'm sure you would.

MISS TRIMMERBACK: Wouldn't you?

MISS WATTS: I have a home.

MISS TRIMMERBACK: You mean Plattsburgh, where you were born?

MISS WATTS: The office. That's my home.

MISS TRIMMERBACK: Some home! I see. The office-wife?

MISS WATTS (*defiantly*): He could get along better without Mrs. Haines or Allen than he could without me.

MISS TRIMMERBACK: Oh, you're very efficient, dear. But what makes you think you're indispensable?

MISS WATTS: I relieve him of a thousand foolish details. I remind him of things he forgets, including, very often these days, his good opinion of himself. I never cry and I don't nag. I guess I *am* the office-wife. And a lot better off than Mrs. Haines. He'll never divorce me!

MISS TRIMMERBACK (*astonished*): Why, you're in love with him! (*They both rise, face each other angrily.*)

MISS WATTS: What if I am? I'd rather work for him than marry the kind of a dumb cluck I could get—(*almost tearful*)—just because he's a *man*—(*Enter MARY, left.*)

MARY: Yes, Miss Watts.

MISS WATTS (*collecting herself quickly*): Here are the inventories of the furniture, Mrs. Haines.

I had the golf cups, the books, etchings, and the ash-stands sent to Mr. Haines's club. (*Pauses.*) Mr. Haines asked if he could also have the portrait of the two children.

MARY (*looking at the blank space over the mantel*): Oh, but——

MISS WATTS: He said it wouldn't matter, if you really didn't *care* for him to have it.

MARY: It's in storage.

MISS WATTS (*laying a paper on the table*): This will get it out. Sign there. The cook's letter of reference. Sign here. (*MARY sits, signs.*) The insurance papers. You sign here. (*MISS TRIMMERBACK signs each paper after MARY.*) The transfer papers on the car. What do you want done with it?

MARY: Well, I——

MISS WATTS: I'll find a garage. Sign here. What do you want done if someone meets your price on this apartment?

MARY: Well, I thought——

MISS WATTS: This gives us power of attorney until you get back. Sign here.

MARY: But—I——

MISS WATTS: Oh, it's quite in order, Mrs. Haines. Now, Mr. Haines took the liberty of drawing you a new will. (*Places a blue, legal-looking document before MARY.*)

MARY (*indignantly*): But—really——

MISS WATTS: If anything were to happen to you in Reno, half your property would revert to him. A detail your lawyers overlooked. Mr. Haines drew up a codicil cutting himself out——

MARY: But, I don't understand legal language, Miss Watts. I—I must have my lawyer——

MISS WATTS: As you please. (*Stiffly*) Mr. Haines suggested this for *your* sake, not his. I'm sure you realise, he has nothing but your interests at heart. (*A pause.*) Sign here. (*MARY signs, MISS WATTS signs.*) We need three witnesses. (*Enter JANE, right, with a box of flowers.*) Your maid will do.

MARY: Jane, please witness this. It's my will.

JANE (*in tears*): Oh, Mrs. Haines! (*Signs.*)

MISS WATTS (*gathering all the papers*): You can always make changes, in the event of your remarriage. (*MARY rises.*) And don't hesitate to let me know at the office, if there is anything I can ever do for you.

MARY (*coldly*): There will be nothing, Miss Watts.

MISS WATTS (*cheerfully*): Oh, there are always tag ends to a divorce, Mrs. Haines. And you know how Mr. Haines hates to be bothered with inconsequential details. Good day, Mrs. Haines, and pleasant journey to you! (*Exit MISS WATTS right, followed by MISS TRIMMERBACK.*)

JANE (*snivelling as she places the box on the table*): Mr. Haines said I was to give you these to wear on the train. (*Exits abruptly.* MARY slowly opens the box, takes out a corsage of orchids and a card. Reads aloud: "What can I say? Stephen." Then throws them violently in the corner. Enter MRS. MOREHEAD, LITTLE MARY, dressed for street.)

MRS. MOREHEAD: All set, dear?

MARY (*grimly*): All set—Mary, Mother wants to talk to you before she goes away.

MRS. MOREHEAD: Brother and I will wait for you downstairs. (*Exit MRS. MOREHEAD.*)

MARY: Mary, sit down, dear. (*LITTLE MARY skips to the sofa, sits down. A pause. MARY discovers that it's going to be even more painful and difficult than she imagined.*) Mary——

LITTLE MARY: Yes, Mother?

MARY: Mary——

LITTLE MARY (*perplexed by her mother's tone, which she feels bodes no good to her*): Have I done something wrong, Mother?

MARY: Oh, no, darling, no. (*She sits beside her daughter, and takes her two hands.*) Mary, you know Daddy's been gone for some time.

LITTLE MARY (*sadly*): A whole month.

MARY: Shall I tell you why?

LITTLE MARY (*eagerly*): Why?

MARY (*plunging in*): You know, darling, when a man and woman fall in love what they do, don't you?

LITTLE MARY: They kiss a lot——

MARY: They get married——

LITTLE MARY: Oh, yes. And then they have those children.

MARY: Well, sometimes, married people don't stay in love.

LITTLE MARY: What, Mother?

MARY: The husband and the wife—fall out of love.

LITTLE MARY: Why do they do that?

MARY: Well, they do, that's all. And when they do, they get unmarried. You see?

LITTLE MARY: No.

MARY: Well, they do. They—they get what is called a divorce.

LITTLE MARY (*very matter of fact*): Oh, do they?

MARY: You don't know what a divorce is, but——

LITTLE MARY: Yes, I do. I go to the movies, don't I? And lots of my friends have mummies and daddies who are divorced.

MARY (*relieved, kisses her*): You know I love you very much, don't you, Mary?

LITTLE MARY (*a pause*): Of course, Mother.

MARY: Your father and I are going to get a divorce. That's why I'm going away. That's why— Oh, darling, I can't explain to you quite. But I promise you, when you are older you will understand. And you'll forgive me. You really will! Look at me, baby, please!

LITTLE MARY (*her lips begin to tremble*): I'm looking at you, Mother—doesn't Daddy love you any more?

MARY: No, he doesn't.

LITTLE MARY: Don't you love him?

MARY: I—I—no, Mary.

LITTLE MARY: Oh, Mother, why?

MARY: I—I don't know—but it isn't either Daddy's or Mother's fault.

LITTLE MARY: But, Mother, when you love somebody I thought you loved them until the day you die!

MARY: With children, yes. But grown-ups are different. They can fall out of love.

LITTLE MARY: I won't fall out of love with you and Daddy when I grow up. Will you fall out of love with me?

MARY: Oh, no, darling, that's different, too.

LITTLE MARY (*miserable*): I don't see *how*.

MARY: You'll have to take my word for it, baby, it is. This divorce has nothing to do with our love for you.

LITTLE MARY: But if you and Daddy—

MARY (*rising and drawing her daughter up to her*): Darling, I'll explain it better to you in the taxi. We'll go alone in the taxi, shall we?

LITTLE MARY: But, Mother, if you and Daddy are getting a divorce, which one won't I see again? Daddy or you?

MARY: You and Brother will live with me. That's what happens when—when people get divorced. Children must go with their mothers. But you'll see Daddy—sometimes. Now, darling, come along.

LITTLE MARY: Please, Mother, wait for me downstairs.

MARY: Why?

LITTLE MARY: I have to go to the bathroom.

MARY: Then hurry along, dear— (*Sees the orchids on the floor, and as she moves to the door stoops, picks them up, goes out. LITTLE MARY stands looking after her, stricken. Suddenly she goes to the back of the chair, hugs it, as if for comfort. Then she begins to cry and beat the back of the chair with her fists.*)

LITTLE MARY: Oh, please, please, Mother dear— Oh! Daddy, Daddy, darling! Oh, why don't you do something—do something—Mother dear!

CURTAIN

SCENE IV

A month later.

A room in a lying-in hospital. Left, a door to the corridor. Right, a window banked to the sill with expensive flowers. Centre, a hospital bed, in which EDITH, propped up in a sea of lace pillows, lies with a small bundle at her breast. A white-uniformed nurse sits by the window. The droop of her shoulders is eloquent: EDITH is a trying patient. As the curtain rises, EDITH reaches across the bundle to the bedside table for a cigarette. She can't make it.

EDITH (*whining*): Nurse!

NURSE (*rising wearily*): Yes, Mrs. Potter.

EDITH: Throw me a cigarette.

NURSE: Can't you wait, at least until you're through nursing?

EDITH: How many children have you nursed? I've nursed four. (NURSE *lights her cigarette*; EDITH *shifts the bundle slightly*.) Ouch! Damn it! It's got jaws like a dinosaur. (*Enter PEGGY with a box of flowers.*)

PEGGY: Hello, Edith.

EDITH (*in a faint voice*): Hello, Peggy.

PEGGY (*putting flowers on bed*): Here—

EDITH: How thoughtful! Nurse, will you ask this damn' hospital if they're equipped with a decent vase? (NURSE *takes the box, opens flowers and arranges them, with others, in the window.*)

PEGGY (*leans over baby*): Oh, let me see. Oh, Edith, isn't he divine!

EDITH: I hate that milky smell.

PEGGY (*alarmed*): What's that on his nose?

EDITH: What nose? Oh, that's an ash. (*Blows away the ash. Hands PEGGY a letter from bedside table.*)

PEGGY: Mary?

EDITH (*nodding*): All about how healthy Reno is. Not a word about how she feels. I thought she cared more about Stephen than that. She sends her love to you and John. (PEGGY *reads. The wail of a new-born is heard outside.*)

EDITH: Nurse, close that door. (*The NURSE closes the door.*) I can't tell you what that new-born yodel does to my nerves. (*To PEGGY*) What're you so down in the mouth about? I feel as badly about it as you do, but it was the thing Mary wanted to do, or she wouldn't have done

it. Judging by that, she's reconciled to the whole idea.

PEGGY: She's just being brave!

EDITH: Brave? Why should she bother to be brave with her friends? Here, Nurse, he's through. (*The NURSE takes the bundle from her.*) I told Phelps to be sure to tell Stephen that Mary's perfectly happy. It will cheer Stephen up. He's been going around like a whipped dog.

PEGGY: Oh, Edith, please let me hold him! (*The NURSE gives PEGGY the baby.*)

NURSE (*smiling*): Careful of his back, Mrs. Day.

PEGGY (*goes to the window, hugging the bundle*): Oh, I like the feeling so!

EDITH: You wouldn't like it so much if you'd just had it. (*Whimpering*) I had a terrible time, didn't I, Nurse?

NURSE: Oh, no, Mrs. Potter. You had a very easy time. (*She is suddenly angry.*) Why, women like you don't know what a terrible time is. Try bearing a baby and scrubbing floors. Try having one in a cold filthy kitchen, without ether, without a change of linen, without decent food, without a cent to bring it up—and try getting up the next day with your insides falling out, to cook your husband's——! (*Controls herself.*) No, Mrs. Potter, you didn't have a terrible time at all—I'll take the baby, please. (*Sees the reluctant expression on PEGGY's face*) I hope some day you'll have one of your own, Mrs. Day. (*The NURSE exits with the baby. PEGGY breaks into tears.*)

EDITH: Well, for God's sake, Peggy, that old battle-axe didn't hurt my feelings a bit! They're all the same. If you don't get peritonitis or have quintuplets, they think you've had a picnic—— (*PEGGY sits beside the bed, crying.*) What's the matter?

PEGGY: Oh, Edith—John and I are getting a divorce!

EDITH (*patting her hand*): Well, darling, that's what I heard!

PEGGY (*surprised*): But—but we didn't decide to until last night.

EDITH (*cheerfully*): Oh, darling, everybody could see it was in the cards. Money, I suppose?

PEGGY (*nodding*): Oh, dear! I wish Mary were here——

EDITH: Well, she'll be there. (*Laughs.*) Oh, forgive me, dear. I do feel sorry for you. But it is funny.

PEGGY: What's funny?

EDITH: It's going to be quite a gathering of the clan. (*Sitting up in bed, full of energy to break the news*) Howard Fowler's bounced Sylvia out right on her ear! He's threatened to divorce her right here in New York if she doesn't go to Reno. And name her young customer's man——

PEGGY: But—Howard's always known——

EDITH: Certainly. He hired him, so he'd have plenty of time for his own affairs. Howard's got some girl he wants to marry. But nobody, not even Winchell, knows who she is! Howard's a coony cuss. (*Laughing*) I do think it's screaming. When you remember how Sylvia always thought she was putting something over on us girls! (*She laughs so hard, she gives herself a stitch. She falls back among her pillows, limp and martyred.*)

PEGGY (*bitterly*): Life's awfully unattractive, isn't it?

EDITH (*yawning*): Oh, I wouldn't complain if that damned stork would take the Indian sign off me.

CURTAIN

SCENE V

A few weeks later. MARY's living-room in a Reno hotel. In the rear wall, a bay window showing a view of Reno's squat roof-tops and distant Nevada ranges. Left, doors to the kitchenette, the bedroom. Right, a door to the corridor. A plush armchair, a sofa. In the corner, MARY's half-packed trunks and bags. It is all very drab and ugly. As the curtain rises, LUCY, a slatternly middle-aged, husky woman in a house-dress, is packing the clothes that are strewn on the armchair and the table. She is singing in a nasal falsetto.

LUCY:

Down on ole Smokey, all covered with snow,
I lost my true lov-ver, from courtin' too slow.
Courtin' is pul-leasure, partin' is grief,
Anna false-hearted lov-ver is worse thanna
thief——

[PEGGY enters, right. She wears a polo-coat and a wool tam. She is on the verge of tears.]

PEGGY: Lucy, where's Mrs. Haines?

LUCY: Down waiting for the mail. You'll miss her a lot when she goes to-morrow? (PEGGY nods, sinks, dejected, on the sofa.) Mrs. Haines is about the nicest ever came here.

PEGGY: I hate Reno.

LUCY: You didn't come for fun. (Goes on with her packing and singing.)

The grave'll de-cay you, an' change you tuh
dust,
Ain't one boy outta twenty, a poor gal kin
trust——

PEGGY: You've seen lots of divorcees, haven't you, Lucy?

LUCY: Been cookin' for 'em for ten years.

PEGGY: You feel sorry for us?

LUCY: Well, ma'am, I don't. You feel plenty sorry enough for yourselves. (*Kindly*) Lord, you ain't got much else to do.

PEGGY (*resentfully*): You've never been married, Lucy.

LUCY (*indignant*): I've had three——

PEGGY: Husbands?

LUCY: Kids!

PEGGY: Oh, then you're probably very happy——

LUCY: Lord, ma'am, I stopped thinking about being happy years ago.

PEGGY: You don't think about being happy?

LUCY: Ain't had the time. With the kids and all. And the old man such a demon when he's drinking—— Them big, strong, red-headed men. They're fierce.

PEGGY: Oh, Lucy, he beats you? How terrible!

LUCY: Ain't it? When you think what a lot of women in this hotel need a beating worse than me.

PEGGY: But you live in Reno. You could get a divorce overnight.

LUCY: Lord, a woman can't get herself worked up to a thing like that overnight. I had a mind to do it once. I had the money, too. But I had to call it off.

PEGGY: Why?

LUCY: I found out I was in a family way. (*There is a rap on the door.*)

PEGGY (*going to her*): Lucy, tell Mrs. Haines I must talk to her—alone—before supper——
(*Enter COUNTESS DE LAGE, left. She is a silly, amiable, middle-aged woman, with carefully waved, bleached hair. She wears a gaudily checked riding*

habit, carries an enormous new sombrero and a jug of corn liquor.)

COUNTESS: Ah, Peggy, how are you, dear child?

PEGGY: All right, Countess de Lage.

COUNTESS: I've been galloping madly over the desert all day. Lucy, here's a wee juggie. We must celebrate Mrs. Haines's divorce.

PEGGY: Oh, Countess de Lage, I don't think a divorce is anything to celebrate.

COUNTESS: Wait till you've lost as many husbands as I have, Peggy. (*Wistfully*) Married, divorced, married, divorced! But where Love leads I always follow. So here I am, in Reno.

PEGGY: Oh, I wish I were anywhere else on earth.

COUNTESS: My dear, you've got the Reno jumpy-wumpies. Did you go to the doctor? What did he say?

PEGGY: He said it was—the altitude.

COUNTESS: Well, la, la, you'll get used to that. My third husband was a Swiss. If one lives in Switzerland, Peggy, one has simply got to accept the Alps. As I used to say to myself, Flora, there those damn' Alps are, and there's very little even you can do about it.

PEGGY: Yes, Countess de Lage. (*Exits, hurriedly, left.*)

COUNTESS: Oh, I wish she hadn't brought up the Alps, Lucy. It always reminds me of that nasty moment I had the day Gustav made me climb to the top of one of them. (*Sits in armchair.*) Lucy, pull off my boots. (*LUCY kneels, tugs at her boots.*) Anyhow, there we were. And suddenly it struck me that Gustav had pushed me. (*Tragically*) I slid halfway down the mountain before I realised that Gustav didn't love me any more

(*Gaily*) But Love takes care of its own, Lucy. I slid right into the arms of my fourth husband, the Count.

LUCY (*rises, with boots*): Ain't that the one you're divorcing now?

COUNTRESS: But, of course, Lucy. (*Plaintively*) What could I do when I found out he was putting arsenic in my headache powders. Ah! L'amour! L'amour! Lucy, were you ever in love?

LUCY: Yes, ma'am.

COUNTRESS: Tell me about it, Lucy.

LUCY: Well, ma'am, ain't much to tell. I was kinda enjoyin' the courtin' time. It was as purty a sight as you ever saw, to see him come lopin' across them hills. The sky so big and blue and that hair of his, blazing like the be-jesus in the sun. Then we'd sit on my back fence and spark. But, ma'am, you know how them big, strong, red-headed men are. They just got to get to the point. So we got married, ma'am. And natcherally, I ain't had no chanct to think about love since——

COUNTRESS (*she has not been listening*): The trouble with me, Lucy, is I've been marrying too many foreigners. I think I'll go back to marrying Americans. (*Enter MIRIAM, right. She is a breezy, flashy red-head, about twenty-eight years old. She is wearing a theatrical pair of lounging pyjamas.*)

MIRIAM: Hya, Lucy?

LUCY: Evening, Mrs. Aarons. (*Exits, right.*)

MIRIAM: Hya, Countess, how's rhythm on the range? (*Sees the jug on the table, pours the COUNTRESS and herself drinks.*)

COUNTRESS: Gallop, gallop, gallop, madly over the sagebrush! But now, Miriam, I'm having an emotional relapse. In two weeks I'll be free, free

as a bird from that little French bastard. But whither, oh, whither shall I fly?

MIRIAM: To the arms of that cowboy up at the dude ranch?

COUNTESS (*modestly*): Miriam Aarons!

MIRIAM: Why, he's nuts for you, Countess. He likes you better than his horse, and it's such a damn' big horse.

COUNTESS (*rises, and pads in her stocking-feet to the sofa*): Well, Buck Winston is nice. So young. So strong. Have you noticed the play of his muscles? (*Reclining*) Musical. Musical.

MIRIAM: He could crack a coconut with those knees. If he could get them together. Say, Countess, that guy hasn't been arousing your honourable intentions, has he?

COUNTESS: Yes, Miriam, but I'm different from the rest of you. I've always put my faith in love. Still, I've had four divorces. Dare I risk a fifth?

MIRIAM: What are you risking, Countess, or maybe I shouldn't ask?

COUNTESS: I mean, Miriam, I could never make a success of Buck at Newport.

MIRIAM: Even Mrs. Astor would have to admit Buck's handsome. If I had your dough, I'd take him to Hollywood first, then Newport.

COUNTESS: Hollywood? Why *not*? I might turn him into a picture star. After all, my second husband was a gondolier, and a month after I married him, a Duchess eloped with him. Ah! L'amour! (*Enter SYLVIA, right. She is wearing a smart dinner dress. Her trip to Reno has embittered her, but it has not subdued her.*)

MIRIAM: Hya, Sylvia? Going to a ball?

SYLVIA (*pours a drink*): Doing the town with a boy friend.

MIRIAM: Where'd you pick him up?

SYLVIA: The Silver State Bar. I'm not going to sit around, moping, like Mary.

COUNTESS: Poor Mary. If her husband gave her the flimsiest excuse, she'd take him back.

SYLVIA: She has no pride. I'd roast in hell before I'd take Howard Fowler back. Kicking me out like that! After all I sacrificed!

MIRIAM: Such as what?

SYLVIA: I gave him my youth!

COUNTESS (*dreamily*): Hélas, what else can a woman do with her youth, but give it to a man?

MIRIAM: Hélas, she can't preserve it in alcohol.

COUNTESS (*practical*): But, Sylvia, how could your husband kick you out, if you were a femme fidèle?

SYLVIA: Of course, I was a faithful wife. (MIRIAM *snorts*.) What are you laughing at?

MIRIAM: Two kinds of women. Sylvia, owls and ostriches. (*Raises her glass*.) To the feathered sisterhood! To the girls who *get* paid and paid. (*Parenthetically*) And you got paid *plenty*!

SYLVIA: You bet I got plenty! The skunk!

COUNTESS: I never got a sou from any of my husbands except my first husband, Mr. Straus. He said the most touching thing in his will. I remember every word of it. "To my beloved wife, Flora, I leave all my estate in trust to be administered by executors, because she is an A No. 1 *schlemeil*." (*Touched anew*) Wasn't that sweet?

MIRIAM (*enter MARY, right. She is subdued. She is carrying some letters*): Hya, queen?

MARY: Fine.

MIRIAM: Ya lie.

COUNTRESS: Mary, I'm starved.

[LUCY enters left, takes MARY's hat.

MARY: Supper's nearly ready. As my last official act in Reno, I cooked the whole thing with my hands, didn't I, Lucy?

LUCY: All but the steak and tomatoes and dessert, Mrs. Haines. (*Exits, left.*)

MARY (*gives a letter to SYLVIA, glancing, as she does so, at the inscription*): For you, Sylvia. From Edith?

SYLVIA: You couldn't miss that infantile handwriting. (*Pointedly*) You didn't hear from anyone?

MARY: No.

SYLVIA: Well, darling, Stephen's hardly worth a broken heart.

MARY: The less you have to say about me and Stephen the better I like it!

SYLVIA: I'm only trying to cheer you up. That's more than you do for me.

MARY: I'm doing enough, just being pleasant to you.

SYLVIA: My, you have got the jitters, dear.

MIRIAM: Hey, Sylvia, we're all out here in the same boat. Mary's laid off you. Why don't you lay off her?

SYLVIA: Oh, I'm just trying to make her see life isn't over just because Stephen let her down. (*Opens her letter. A batch of press-clippings falls out. The COUNTRESS picks them up, reads them idly, as SYLVIA goes on with the letter.*)

COUNTRESS: You see, Miriam? What else is there for a woman but I'amour?

MIRIAM: There's a little corn whiskey left. (*She pours another drink.*)

COUNTESS : Cynic, you don't believe in Cupid.

MIRIAM : That double-crossing little squirt !
Give me Donald Duck. (*To MARY*) Have a drink ? (*MARY shakes her head.*) Listen, Babe, why not—give out ? You'd feel better—

MARY (*laughing*) : Miriam, you're not very chatty about your own affairs.

COUNTESS (*suddenly engrossed by the clippings from SYLVIA's letter*) : Miriam, you sly puss, you never told us you even knew Sylvia's husband.

SYLVIA (*looking up from her letter*) : What ?

COUNTESS (*rises*) : Sylvia, listen to this : " Miriam Vanities Aarons is being Renovated. Three guesses, Mrs. Fowler, for whose Ostermoor ? " (*SYLVIA snatches the clippings from her.*)

MIRIAM : Why can't those lousy rags leave a successful divorce alone ?

COUNTESS (*reading another clipping*) : " Prominent stockbroker and ex-chorine to marry."

SYLVIA (*to MIRIAM*) : Why, you little hypocrite ! (*During this, PEGGY has entered and goes back of the sofa. She listens but does not join the group.*)

MARY (*going to her*) : Now, Sylvia—

SYLVIA : Did you know this ?

MARY : Oh, Sylvia, why do you care ? You don't love Howard—

SYLVIA (*brushing her aside*) : That has nothing to do with it. (*To MIRIAM, fiercely*) How much did he settle on you ?

MIRIAM : I made Howard pay for what he wants ; you made him pay for what he doesn't want.

SYLVIA : You want him for his money.

MIRIAM : So what do you want him for ? I'll stay bought. That's more than you did, Sylvia.

SYLVIA : Why, you dirty little trollop !

MIRIAM: Don't start calling names, you Park Avenue push-over! (SYLVIA gives MIRIAM a terrific smack. In the twinkling of an eye, they are pulling hair. MARY seizes SYLVIA's arm; SYLVIA breaks loose. The COUNTESS tugs at MIRIAM's belt, as LUCY comes in, looks at the fight with a rather professional eye, and exits for the smelling-salts.)

COUNTESS: Tiens! Miriam. Don't be vulgar. (Her interference enables SYLVIA to slap MIRIAM unimpeded.)

MIRIAM (shoving the COUNTESS on the sofa): Out of the way, you fat old——! (SYLVIA grabs MIRIAM's hair.) Ouch, let go! (SYLVIA is about to use her nails. MARY takes a hand.)

MARY: I won't have this, you hear! (MARY's interference allows MIRIAM to give SYLVIA a terrific kick in the shins.)

SYLVIA (routed, in sobs): Oh, you hurt me, you bitch, you! (As she turns away, MIRIAM gives her another well-placed kick, which straightens SYLVIA up.)

MIRIAM: Take that! (SYLVIA, shrieking with rage and humiliation, grabs MIRIAM again, sinks her white teeth into MIRIAM's arm. At this mayhem, MARY seizes her, shakes her violently, pushes her sobbing into the armchair.)

MARY (to MIRIAM): That's enough.

MIRIAM: Where's the iodine? (MARY points to bedroom.) Gotta be careful of hydrophobia, you know. (Exits, right.)

SYLVIA (blubbering, nursing her wounds): Oh, Mary, how could you let her do that to me!

MARY (coldly): I'm terribly sorry, Sylvia.

SYLVIA: The humiliation! You're on her side. After all I've done for you!

MARY: What have you done for me?

SYLVIA: I warned you!

MARY (*bitterly*): I'm not exactly grateful for that.

SYLVIA (*hysterical*): Oh, aren't you? Listen to me, you ball of conceit. You're not the object of pity you suppose. Plenty of the girls are tickled to death you got what was coming to you. You deserved to lose Stephen, the stupid way you acted. But I always stood up for you, like a loyal friend. What thanks do I get? You knew about that woman, and you stood by, gloating, while she——

MARY: Get out of here! (*LUCY enters from the bedroom, with a bottle of spirits of ammonia, as SYLVIA gives way completely to hysteria, and, screaming with rage, picks up ash-trays, glasses, and cigarette-boxes, and hurls them violently against the wall.*)

SYLVIA (*at the top of her lungs*): I hate you! I hate you! I hate everybody——

LUCY (*takes SYLVIA firmly by the shoulders, forces the bottle under her nose*): Listen, Mrs. Fowler! You got the hy-strikes! (*Rushes her gasping, sobbing, to the door.*)

SYLVIA: You wait. Some day you'll need a woman friend. Then you'll think of me——
(*Exit LUCY and SYLVIA, struggling helplessly, right.*)

COUNTESS (*rising from the sofa*): Poor creatures. They've lost their equilibrium because they're lost their faith in love. (*Philosophically*) L'amour. Remember the song Buck made up, just for me? (*Pours herself a drink, sings*) "Oh, a man can ride a horse to the range above, But a woman's got to ride on the wings of love, Coma a ti-yi-yippi." (*Throws the jug over her shoulder, and exits right, still singing, as MIRIAM enters, the ravages of her fight repaired.*)

MIRIAM: The coast clear?

PEGGY: Oh, that was the most disgusting thing I ever saw.

MIRIAM: Right, kid, we're a pair of alley cats——

MARY: You should not be here, Peggy, to see it at all. (*She picks up the ash-trays, etc.*)

MIRIAM: What the hell are you doing here?

MARY: Peggy wanted to buy a car.

PEGGY: With my own money!

MARY: John said they couldn't afford a car.

PEGGY: He couldn't. I could.

MARY: What was his—is yours. What is yours—is your own. Very fair.

PEGGY: A woman's best protection is a little money of her own.

MARY: A woman's best protection is—the right man. (*With gentle sarcasm*) Obviously, John isn't the right man and Peggy will forget all about him in another month.

PEGGY: No, I won't. I can't. Because—because—— (*Bursts into tears.*) Oh, Mary, I'm going to have a baby. Oh, Mary, what shall I do?

MARY: Peggy, what's his telephone number?

PEGGY (*quickly*): Eldorado 5-2075. (*MIRIAM goes at once to the phone. Gets the operator, gives the number.*) But, oh, Mary, I can't tell him!

MIRIAM: Why? Isn't it his?

PEGGY: Oh, of course!

MIRIAM: And make it snappy, operator.

PEGGY: I always wanted it. But what can I do with it now?

MIRIAM: Land it with the Marines——

MARY: Peggy, you've shared your love with him. Your baby will share your blood, your eyes, your hair, your virtues—and your faults—but your little pin-money, that, of course, you could not share.

PEGGY: Oh, Mary, I know I'm wrong. But, it's no use—you don't know the things he said to me. I have my pride.

MARY (*bitterly*): Reno's full of women who all have their pride.

PEGGY: You think I'm like them.

MIRIAM: You've got the makings, dear.

MARY: Love has pride in nothing—but its own humility.

MIRIAM (*at telephone*): Mr. Day, please. Reno calling—Mr. Day? My God, he must live by the phone. Just hold the— (PEGGY *leaps to the phone.*)

PEGGY: Hello, John. (*Clears her throat of a sob.*) No, I'm not sick. That is, I am sick! That is, I'm sick to my stomach. Oh, John! I'm going to have a baby—Oh, darling, are you?—Oh, darling, do you?—Oh, darling, so am I! So do I! Course, I forgive you.—Yes, precious. Yes, lamb. On the very next train! John? (*A kiss into the phone. It is returned.*) Oh, Johnny, when I get back, things are going to be so different—! John, do you mind if I reverse the charges? (*Hangs up.*) I can't stay for supper. I've got to pack.

MARY: When you get back—don't see too much of the girls.

PEGGY: Oh, I won't, Mary. It's all their fault we're here.

MARY: Not—entirely.

PEGGY: Good-bye! Oh, I'm so happy, I could cry. (*Exits, right.*)

MIRIAM: Getting wise, aren't you?

MARY: Know all the answers.

MIRIAM: Then, why're you here?

MARY: I had plenty of advice, Miriam. (*The telephone rings. MIRIAM goes to it.*)

MIRIAM: Hello. No, we completed that call, operator. (*Hangs up.*)

MARY: Cigarette?

MIRIAM (*suddenly*): Listen.

MARY: There's nothing you can say I haven't heard.

MIRIAM: Sure? I come from a world where a woman's got to come out on top—or it's just too damned bad. Maybe I got a new slant.

MARY (*wearily*): All right, Miriam. Talk to me about my—lawful husband. Talk to me about security— What does it all come to? Compromise.

MIRIAM: What the hell? A woman's compromised the day she's born.

MARY: You can't compromise with utter defeat. He doesn't want me.

MIRIAM: How do you know?

MARY: How do I know—why else am I here?

MIRIAM (*a pause. Then, mock-tragically*): Because you've got no guts, Mary Haines. It happened to me—I lost my man, too.

MARY (*smiling*): You?

MIRIAM: Oh, it only happened once. Got wise to myself after that. Look, how did I lose him? We didn't have enough dough to get married. I wouldn't sleep with him until we did. I had ideals—God knows where I got 'em. I held out on him— (*Sighs.*) Can you beat it? I liked him a lot better than I've ever liked anybody since. I never held out again— What'd my Romeo do? Got himself another girl. I made a terrible stink. Why shouldn't I? I should. But what I ought not to have done was say—good-bye, I was like you.

MARY: I don't understand.

MIRIAM: Then get a load of this. I should of licked that girl where she licked me—in the hay.

MARY: Miriam !

MIRIAM: That's where you win in the first round. And if I know men, that's still Custer's Last Stand. (MARY *walks away from her.*) Shocked you? You're too modest. You're ashamed. O.K., sister. But my idea of love is that love isn't ashamed in nothing.

MARY (*turning to her*): A good argument, Miriam. So modern. So simple. Sex the cause, sex the cure. It's too simple, Miriam. Your love battles are for—lovers—or professionals. (*Gently*) Not for a man and woman who've been married twelve quiet years ! Oh, I don't mean I wouldn't love Stephen's arms around me again. But I wouldn't recapture, if I could, our—young passion. That was the wonderful young thing we had. That was part of our youth, like the—babies. But not the thing that made him my husband, that made me his wife—Stephen needed me. He *needed* me for twelve years. Stephen doesn't need me any more.

MIRIAM: I get it. (*Phone rings.*) That's why I'm marrying this guy Fowler. He needs me like hell. If I don't marry him he'll drink himself to death in a month, the poor dope.

MARY (*at the telephone*): Yes ? No, operator, we completed—you say, New York is calling Mrs. Haines ? I'll take that call—— (*To MIRIAM*) Stephen !

MIRIAM: Listen, make him that speech you just made me !

MARY (*radiant*): I knew he'd call. I knew when the last moment came, he'd realise he needed me.

MIRIAM: For God's sake, tell him that *you* need him !

MARY: Hello—hello? Stephen? Mary. Yes. I'm very cheerful. It's so good to hear your voice, Stephen. I—why, yes, it's scheduled for to-morrow at 12—but, Stephen, I can—*(Frightened)* But, Stephen! No—of course—I haven't seen the papers. How could I, out here? *(There is a long pause.)* Yes, I'd rather *you* told me. Of course I understand the position you're both in. No, I'm not bitter, not bitter at all—I—I hope you'll both be very happy. No, I have no plans, no plans at all—Stephen, do you mind if I hang up? Good-bye, Stephen—good-bye—

MIRIAM: He's marrying her?

MARY: Oh, God, why did I let this happen? We were married. We were one person. We had a good life. Oh, God, I've been a *fool*!

MIRIAM: Sure you have. Haven't we all, sister?

MARY: But she doesn't love him. I *do*. That's the way it is. *(She goes to the window, and looks out. There is a pause. Then, violently)* But it's not ended if your heart doesn't say so. It's not ended!

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

Early evening, two years later. CRYSTAL's bathroom. Left, a black marbleised tub with frilled shower-curtains. In a niche, back of the tub, a gilded French telephone. Right, a satin-skirted dressing-table, covered with glittering toilet bottles and cosmetic jars. Towel-racks piled with embroidered bath-towels. Centre, a door to CRYSTAL's bedroom. As the curtain rises, CRYSTAL is lolling in the bath, reading a magazine, smoking, as HELENE, a chic French maid, enters.

HELENE: Madame has been soaking an hour.

CRYSTAL (*rudely*): So what?

HELENE: But, monsieur——

CRYSTAL: Monsieur is going out with me and my friends, whether he likes it or not. Has that kid gone home yet?

HELENE: Mademoiselle Mary has just finished the supper with her daddy. Madame, monsieur is so anxious that you say good night to her.

CRYSTAL: Listen, that kid doesn't want to bid me beddy-bye any more than I do. He's tried for two years to cram us down each other's throats. Let her go home to her mommer. (*Passes HELENE a brush.*) Here—scrub—— Some day I'm going to slap that kid down. She's too—— (*As HELENE scrubs too hard*) Ow! You're taking my skin off—— Oh, I'm so bored I could—— (*Hurls the soap across the room.*) Helene, never marry a man who's deserted a "good woman." He's as cheerful as a man who's murdered his poor old mother. (*Telephone rings.*) Get out! And, Helene, when Mrs. Fowler comes, keep her downstairs, if you have to sit on her. (*Exit HELENE. CRYSTAL picks up the telephone. Her voice melts.*) Hello, darling, I'm in the tub. I'm shrivelled to a peanut waiting for this call. No, I'm not afraid of a shock. You ought to

know—— Oh, Buck, I'm going to miss you like nobody's business. I can't tell you what it did to me, locking the door on our little apartment—— I'll say we had fun ! Coma ti-yi-yippy, what ? Oh, no, say anything you like. This is the one place where I have some privacy—— (*CRYSTAL's back is to the door. She does not hear a brief rap.*) Listen, baby, must you really go to the coast ? Oh, the hell with Mr. Goldwyn. (*Enter LITTLE MARY. She stands hesitantly against the door.*) Listen, you don't have to tell me what you sacrificed to have a movie career. I've seen that cartoon you married. If Flora was ever a Countess, I'm the Duchess of Windsor. Well, Buck, maybe she's not such a half-wit, but—— (*Sees LITTLE MARY*) Oh—call me back in two minutes. I've had a small interruption. (*Hangs up.*) Who told you to come in here ?

LITTLE MARY (*politely*): Daddy. Good night. (*Turns to go.*)

CRYSTAL (*sweetly*): Oh, don't go, darling. Hand me that brush.

LITTLE MARY (*gently*): Please ?

CRYSTAL: Please. (*LITTLE MARY gives her the brush.*)

LITTLE MARY: Good night. (*Goes to the door.*)

CRYSTAL: My, you're in a hurry to tell Daddy about it.

LITTLE MARY: About what ?

CRYSTAL: My talk on the telephone.

LITTLE MARY: I don't understand grown-ups on the telephone. They all sound silly. Good night.

CRYSTAL: Good night, who ? (*A pause.*) You've been told to call me Auntie Crystal. (*A pause.*) Why don't you do it ?

LITTLE MARY (*still edging to the door*): Yes.

CRYSTAL: Yes, what ?

LITTLE MARY (*lamely*): Yes, good night.

CRYSTAL (*angry*): You sit down!

LITTLE MARY: Oh, it's awfully hot in here. I've got my coat on.

CRYSTAL: You heard me! (*LITTLE MARY sits on the stool before the dressing-table, squirms*): We're going to have this out. I've done my damn—my level best to be friends with you, but you refuse to co-operate.

LITTLE MARY: What?

CRYSTAL: Co-operate.

LITTLE MARY (*nodding mechanically*): Co-operate.

CRYSTAL (*exasperated*): Answer my question. You don't like me. Why?

LITTLE MARY (*rising*): Well, good night, Crystal—

CRYSTAL: I said, why?

LITTLE MARY (*very patiently*): Listen, Crystal, my mother told me I wasn't to be rude to you.

CRYSTAL: For the last time, young lady, you give me one good reason why you don't like me.

LITTLE MARY: I never said I didn't like you, Crystal.

CRYSTAL: But you don't like me, do you?

LITTLE MARY: No, but I never *said* so. I've been very polite, Crystal, considering you're something awful!

CRYSTAL: Wait till your father hears this!

LITTLE MARY (*suddenly defiant*): Listen—Daddy doesn't think you're so wonderful any more!

CRYSTAL: Did he tell you that?

LITTLE MARY: No. Daddy always pretends you're all right, but he's just ashamed to have Mother know what a mean, silly wife he's got. And I don't tell Mother what *we* think because you've made her cry enough, Crystal. So I'm not going to co-operate, *ever*!

CRYSTAL: Get out !

LITTLE MARY (*goes to the door, then turns, rather superior*): And another thing, I think this bathroom is perfectly ridiculous ! Good night, Crystal ! (*Exits. The telephone rings. CRYSTAL grabs it, irritable.*)

CRYSTAL: Yes, darling— That Haines brat. God, she gets under my skin !— No, she didn't hear anything. What good would it do her, anyhow ? You're off in the morning, and Lord knows we've been discreet— What ? You are ? (*Giggling*) Dining with the first Mrs. Haines ?— Well, darling, lay off the gin. It makes you talk too much— Well, just be careful, darling. (*Enter SYLVIA, without knocking. She wears an elaborate evening gown, and carries a cocktail. These two years have had no appreciable effect on SYLVIA. She is her old Act One self again.*)

SYLVIA: Yoohoo ! May I come in ?

CRYSTAL (*in the telephone*): No, this is not the Aquarium. It's Grand Central Station. (*Hangs up.*)

SYLVIA: Who was that ?

CRYSTAL: A wrong number.

SYLVIA: You were talking to a man.

CRYSTAL: Pass me that sponge.—Please.

SYLVIA (*waiting on CRYSTAL*): Oh, Crystal, you know you can trust me.

CRYSTAL: And that eye cup.

SYLVIA: There must be someone. After all, I've known Stephen for years. He's really not your type. I often wonder how you two got together. I was telling my psycho-analyst about it. You know, I've got to tell him everything.

CRYSTAL: That must be an awful effort.

SYLVIA: I don't mind discussing myself. But

talking about my friends does make me feel disloyal. He says Stephen has a Guilt Complex.

CRYSTAL: What?

SYLVIA (*cheerfully*): He says men of Stephen's generation were brought up to believe that infidelity is a sin. That's why he allowed Mary to divorce him, and that's why he married you, Crystal. He had to marry you just to convince himself he was not a sexual monster.

CRYSTAL: Yes? Well, if Stephen is a sexual monster, psycho-analysis is through.

SYLVIA: And he says you've got a Cinderella Complex. He says most American women have. They're all brought up to believe that marriage to a rich man should be their aim in life. He says we neither please the men nor function as child-bearing animals——

CRYSTAL (*bored and angry*): Will you function yourself into the bedroom?

SYLVIA (*hurt*): I don't think that's the way to talk to me, after all I've done for you. When you married Stephen you didn't know a soul. It wasn't easy to put *you* over. Everybody was on Mary's side.

CRYSTAL: They still are. They never miss a chance to remind me what a noble, useful woman Mary has become since she left Stephen.

SYLVIA (*comforting*): My dear, she's miserable! Why, she never sees a soul.

CRYSTAL: She's having a dinner party to-night.

SYLVIA: Edith told me. She's going. And Flora.

CRYSTAL: Flora?

SYLVIA: The Countess de Lage. Mrs. Buck Winston? My God, I have to laugh when I think of Flora actually turning that cowboy into a movie star. Of course he's not my type, but he's positively the Chambermaid's Delight——

CRYSTAL (*fiercely*): Will you shut up?

SYLVIA: But, Crystal——

CRYSTAL: I said shut up—— (*Calling*) Helene!

SYLVIA: Well, I think you're very ungrateful!

CRYSTAL: Well, take it up with your psychoanalyst. (*HELENE enters.*) Helene, draw the curtains. I want to take a shower. (*SYLVIA goes to the door as HELENE draws the curtains.*) That's right, Sylvia—wait in the bedroom.

SYLVIA (*sees the scales, decides to weigh herself*): Oh, dear, I've lost another pound. I must remember to tell my analyst. You know, everything means something. (*The shower goes on. HELENE exits. SYLVIA gets off the scales. During the following monologue, she goes to CRYSTAL's dressing-table, where she examines all the bottles and jars.*) But even my analyst says no woman should try to do as much as I do. He says I attach too much value to my feminine friendships. He says I have a Damon and Pythias Complex. I guess I have given too much of myself to other women. He says women are natural enemies—— (*Picks up bottle.*) Why, Crystal, I thought you didn't touch up your hair—— (*Sniffing perfume*) My dear, I wouldn't use this. You smell it on every tart in New York. That reminds me——(*going to the shower-curtains*)——if you do have an affair, Crystal, for heaven's sake, be discreet. Remember what Howard did to me, the skunk. (*Peeking in*) My, you're putting on weight. (*Going back to dressing-table, she sits down, and begins to pry in all the drawers.*) But men are so mercenary. They think they own you body and soul, just because they pay the bills——I tried this cream. It brought out pimples——Of course, Crystal, if you were smart, you'd have a baby. It's the only real hold a woman has—— (*HELENE enters.*)

HELENE: Monsieur says will madame be long?

SYLVIA: Can't you see she's rushing?——

(HELENE exits. *The shower goes off.*) Men are so selfish ! When you're only making yourself beautiful for them. (*Opens another drawer.*) I wish I could find a man who would understand my need for a companion—— (*Finds a key, examines it.*) Why, Crystal, what are you doing with a key to the Gothic Apartments ? (CRYSTAL'S head pops from behind the curtain.)

CRYSTAL : What ?—Oh—— (*Nervously*) Oh, that ! (*Playing for time*) Throw me a towel, Sylvia !

SYLVIA (*bringing her towel*) : That's where Howard had me followed. The doorman there is a professional blackmailer ! (CRYSTAL has wrapped herself in a big towel, now steps from behind the shower-curtains and sits on the rim of the tub to dry her legs.) I asked my psycho-analyst about him, and he said blackmailers are really perverts who can't think of a good perversion. So they blackmail people instead.

CRYSTAL (*going to the dressing-table*) : Really ? Well, he can't blackmail me now. (*As she passes SYLVIA, she lightly snatches the key from her.*) The Gothic Apartments are where Stephen and I had to go before the divorce. I keep it for sentimental reasons. (*Smiling, she drops the key back in the drawer, locks it.*)

SYLVIA : Poor Stephen ! My dear, I thought tonight how tired he looked, and old. Crystal, I've told you everything. Tell me : how long do you think you can be faithful to Stephen ?

CRYSTAL (*making up her face*) : Well, life plays funny tricks. The urge might hit me to-morrow.

SYLVIA : I doubt it, pet. You're a typical blonde.

CRYSTAL : So what ?

SYLVIA (*loftily*) : Most blondes are frigid.

CRYSTAL : Really ? Well, maybe that's just a dirty piece of brunette propaganda !

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Eleven o'clock the same night. MARY's bedroom. A charming, simple room. Left, a door to the dressing-room. Right, a door to the hall. As the curtain rises, JANE is arranging a number of evening wraps on the bed. MIRIAM, MARY and NANCY are entering.

MIRIAM: Thanks, baby, a lot ! I never was at a wetter dinner.

MARY: It was a success. I left Reno two years ago to-day. This was a memorial dinner for you old Renoites, and your new husbands.

MIRIAM: I get it. Listen, there's no soap eating out your heart, sister !

NANCY: Mary, if I had a heroine in one of my books who behaved the way you do, my two readers would never believe it. No one man is worth it.

MIRIAM: Say, the whole Racquet Club's not worth it—— Speaking of my dear husband Howard—the skunk—can I have a whiskey and soda ?

NANCY: Make it two. (*JANE exits, right.*)

MIRIAM: I lay off when Howard's around. I'm weaning him from the bottle by easy stages. He's in the secondary stage now.

NANCY: What stage is that ?

MIRIAM: He puts ice in.

MARY: How's matrimony, Miriam ? Making a go of it ?

MIRIAM: I'm doing a reconstruction job that makes Boulder Dam look like an egg-cup. (*Enter PEGGY, right.*)

PEGGY: Oh, Mary, can't we get off to the party ? I have to get home early. Little John always

wakes up. Little John said the cutest thing the other day. (*A dramatic pause.*) He said da-da——!

NANCY: When does he enter Columbia? (*Enter JANE with tray and highballs.*)

MARY: Jane, tell Mrs. Winston the ladies are ready to go.

JANE: Mrs. Winston, ma'am, is drinking with the gentlemen.

MARY: Well, tell her to come up. (*Exit JANE.*)

MIRIAM: What's the hurry? Two more snootfuls, and Flora will float up on her own breath. (*Enter EDITH, right.*)

EDITH (*petulantly*): Mary, I wish you had an elevator in this house. It's so difficult to walk upstairs in my condition.

MARY: Edith, are you Catholic or just careless?

EDITH: Mary, isn't this your old furniture?

MARY: Yes.

EDITH: I think you should get rid of it. There's nothing that keeps a woman so in the dumps as sleeping in a bed with old associations. Mary, you're carrying this nunnery business too far. How do you expect to find anyone else, if you don't make an effort?

MARY: I don't want anyone, Edith. (*Mock cynical*) I hate men! Men are awful——

EDITH: Oh, they're not all like Stephen, dear.

MARY: I saw plenty of men when I came back from Reno. They're all alike. They never leave you at your own front door without a wrestling-match.

EDITH: You know I asked Phelps about that once. I said, "Why does a man always act like a Don Juan in a taxi?" And he said it was a

hang-over from their bachelor days when a man's sex life was conditioned by the click of the meter.

MIRIAM: It beats me how in a taxi, the nicest guy turns into Harpo Marx.

EDITH: Mary, want to hear something about Sylvia? (MARY, MIRIAM, NANCY and PEGGY: *chorus*, "No!") Well, Sylvia's going to a psycho-analyst. She says you destroyed all her faith in friendship.

MARY: As if any woman needed to go to a psycho-analyst to find out she can't trust women.

EDITH: Mary, you've grown awfully hard since you deserted your old friends.

MARY: Isn't "wise" the word? I'm beginning to understand women.

NANCY: Too bad! It's the beginning of woman's inhumanity to woman.

EDITH (*moving to door, left*): Oh, they're going to talk philosophy, Peggy. Come on in here while I powder my nose.

PEGGY: Edith, did I tell you how little John said da-da?

EDITH: Listen, I wouldn't care if *this* one stood up and sang "The Star-spangled Banner"! (*They exit, as enter MRS. MOREHEAD, in street clothes, right.*)

MRS. MOREHEAD: Oh, hello, girls! Hello, dear. Party over?

MARY: Enjoy the movies, Mother?

MRS. MOREHEAD: I wish I could make up my mind whether or not I like Shirley Temple. (*Enter the COUNTESS DE LAGE, right. She is a tangle of tulle and jewels. She has a slight "edge" on.*)

COUNTESS: Such a lovely dinner ! It's so wonderful to see all our lives temporarily settled !

MARY: My mother, Mrs. Morehead, Mrs. Winston. Mrs. Buck Winston.

MRS. MOREHEAD (*trying to place the name*): Buck Winston ?

MARY: The movie star.

MRS. MOREHEAD: Ah, yes ! (*Pleasantly*) My grand-daughter adores your son on the screen.

COUNTESS (*good-naturedly*): I daresay the public does see Buck as just a boy. And it is a trifle absurd *me* being married to a movie star. But, Mrs. Morehead, you wouldn't believe how many of my Newport friends who ridiculed Buck when I married him positively claw for invitations to Hollywood. Mais là, East is East and West is West, but I always say Le Cinema is the Great Leveller !

MRS. MOREHEAD: You don't say ! (*Edges to the hall-door.*)

COUNTESS: Mrs. Morehead, do whip into something, and come along with Mary to my party. The Casino Roof. Everyone's clamoured to come. I have no idea who's going to be there.

MRS. MOREHEAD: Well, you're sure to know somebody. (*To MARY*) Later, dear ? (*MARY nods, MRS. MOREHEAD escapes, right.*)

COUNTESS (*gathering her wrap*): Mary, you're not coming ?

MARY: I'm very tired, Flora.

COUNTESS: Oh, you're cross because Buck's had a wee droppie.

MIRIAM: Don't be modest, Flora. Your ducky is stinko.

COUNTESS: I do wish he wouldn't drink straight

gin. You know, he's not allowed to. Mr. Goldwyn put that in the new contract.

MIRIAM: I wish I'd had my marriage licence drawn up by Mr. Goldwyn.

COUNTESS: Mary, do come. This is *really* our farewell party. I'm never coming back to New York.

MARY: What's wrong with New York, Flora?

COUNTESS: Well, when Buck isn't working we're not going to live anywhere. (*Whispering*) Mary, can I trust you?

MARY: Of course, Flora!

COUNTESS (*to the others*): You will keep this just between the four of us?

MIRIAM: Shoot, Flora, it's a nation-wide hook-up!

COUNTESS (*settling herself beside MARY on the foot of the bed*): Well, you know how Buck was? (*Wistfully*) So—so impassioné?

MIRIAM: The boy had something.

COUNTESS (*tartly*): Well, he hasn't got it any more, Miriam! First, I thought it was just gin, interfering with his libido— (*Tearfully*) But now I think Buck is deceiving me—

NANCY: How incredible!

COUNTESS: Well, I have no proof. Except he comes home every afternoon smelling of a strange perfume.

MARY: Where does he say he's been?

COUNTESS: Visiting his horse. But Trixie was shipped to Hollywood last week. You remember, I was photographed with her in the baggage-car? Now he says he's been going to the Grand Central Gymnasium. But I telephoned to-day. Some great oaf answered. I said: "Is Buck

Winston there? " He said: " Who? No." So I said: " My dear good man, he comes every day." So he said: " My mistake, lady, he's inside now boxing with Rudolph Valentino."

MARY: Poor Flora !

COUNTESS (*practical*): That's why I think it's safer just to keep floating around.

MARY: I understand—I'amour.

COUNTESS: L'amour, yes, but jamais. (*She has her lucid moments.*) Jamais lopsided amour !

MARY (*laughing*): Lopsided amour is better than no amour at all. Flora, let him make a fool of you. Let him do anything he wants, as long as he stays. He's taking the trouble to deceive you. (*Half to herself*) And if he took the trouble, he really must have cared——

NANCY: The Voice of Experience.

MIRIAM (*to COUNTESS*): Come on, chin up.

NANCY: That's right. Both of them ! (*Enter PEGGY and EDITH.*)

COUNTESS (*rising*): Oh, chéries, you missed it ! I was just saying—now will you keep this just among the six of us ?—I suspect Buck of being unfaithful. Of course, it's my own fault. I should have had him watched. The way I did all the others. I wish I'd found out where he's had that apartment !

PEGGY: An apartment—— ?

COUNTESS: Where would you expect him to go ? Central Park ? Why, it's winter.

PEGGY: Oh, I've always heard people went to hotels.

COUNTESS: But, chérie, *Buck* couldn't go to a hotel. You know what would happen. At the

most inopportune moment someone would say: "Mr. Winston, may I have your autograph?" It happened to us on our wedding night. I would have sent for the manager, but it was the manager asking for the autograph. Ah, well, off to Hollywood in the morning! That's safe! (*Moving to door*) Dear Mr. Hays will protect me from Harlow. (*Exits, right.*)

EDITH (*getting her wrap*): Darling, you really won't come to Flora's party?

MARY: No, Edith!

EDITH: Then I can tell you. Of course, I know how you feel about your Ex—and his New Deal—though I think you'd be glad he's so happy.

MARY: I am.

EDITH: Sylvia telephoned to-night. She and Crystal and Stephen are going on to the Roof with a theatre party. Well, darling, I don't feel much like going myself. I loathe this dress. My husband says I look as though I were going to sing in it. (*Exits, right.*)

NANCY: Think I'll go, too, Mary! It's a good chance to study Park Avenue's flora and fauna. And I'm writing a new book. It's called *Gone with the Ice-man*, or *Sex has no Place in the Home*. (*Exits with PEGGY.*)

MIRIAM (*to MARY*): Listen, Queen, change your mind! Let's go on to the party!

MARY: No, Miriam.

MIRIAM: Well, I'm going. Wish you could see the cooing-fest Howard and I put on for Sylvia—Shall I spit in Crystal's eye for you? (*MARY shakes her head.*) You're passing up a swell chance, sister! Where I spit no grass grows ever! (*Exits. JANE enters, right. MARY begins to unfasten her dress, takes off her jewels, lays them on the dresser.*)

MARY: Jane, turn down my bed.

JANE: Yes, ma'am. (MARY goes into the boudoir, left.)

MARY (off-stage): Did Mary have a nice time with her father?

JANE (turning down the bed): Well, ma'am, you know how she is when she comes home.

MARY (off-stage): I'm afraid she's never going to get used to it.

JANE: She takes after you, ma'am, if you'll pardon me. Always brooding. Sometimes, ma'am, I think it would be better if she didn't see her father. Or maybe, ma'am—though it's none of my business—if you could find some nice man—— (Enter MRS. MOREHEAD, right, in a wrapper and slippers.)

MRS. MOREHEAD: Going to bed, darling?

MARY (off-stage): Yes, Mother.

MRS. MOREHEAD: Shall we chat for a moment? Jane, I'll have a cigarette.

JANE (surprised): Mrs. Morehead!

MRS. MOREHEAD: Those dreadful women made me nervous. Why Mrs. Haines tolerates them even once a year is beyond me!

MARY (entering, in a nightgown): An object lesson. Smoking, Mother?

MRS. MOREHEAD: Oh, you, too?

MARY: Me too?

MRS. MOREHEAD: I just felt that spooky pinch. You'd think after ten years your father's ghost might have grown more tolerant.

JANE: Good night, ma'am. (Switches off side-lights.)

MARY and MRS. MOREHEAD: Good night, Jane.

(Exit JANE. MARY gets into bed, opens a book, flips through it.)

MRS. MOREHEAD (*sitting on the bed*): Good book?

MARY: Don't know. Nancy just gave it to me. It's about—love. Poetry. All about love. (*Reads*) "When love beckons to you, follow him, though his ways are hard and steep. And when his wings enfold you, yield to him—though his voice may shatter your dreams as the North Wind lays waste the garden."

MRS. MOREHEAD: Well, all I can say is, that's very tactless of Nancy. (*Suddenly*) Oh, Mary, I wish you could find——

MARY (*slams book shut*): Some nice man. We've been all over that before, Mother. I had the only one I ever wanted, I lost him——

MRS. MOREHEAD: It wasn't entirely your fault.

MARY: If I hadn't listened to everyone, everything but my own heart!

MRS. MOREHEAD: He loved her.

MARY: He still does. Though you know, Mother, I'm just beginning to doubt it.

MRS. MOREHEAD: Why?

MARY: Because so many people, like Edith, make a point of telling me how much he loves her. Oh, Mother, I'm terribly tired.

MRS. MOREHEAD: Well, do cheer up, darling. Living alone has its compensations. You can go where you please, wear what you please and eat what you please. I had to wait twenty years to order the kind of meal I liked! Your father called it bird-food—— And, heaven knows, it's marvellous to be able to sprawl out in bed, like a swastika. Good night, darling.

MARY: Good night, Mother.

MRS. MOREHEAD: Don't read by that light. You'll hurt your eyes. (*Exits. MARY props herself against the pillows, begins to read.*)

MARY: "But if in your fear you would seek only love's peace and love's pleasure, then it is better for you to pass out of love's threshing-floor, into the seasonless world; where you shall laugh, but not all of your laughter, and weep, but not all of your tears." (*Enter LITTLE MARY, in a nightgown, barefooted, and very sleepy.*)

LITTLE MARY: Mother?

MARY: Darling, what's the matter?

LITTLE MARY (*goes to the bed*): I had a bad dream!

MARY: Darling, what was it?

LITTLE MARY: I forget. Let me crawl in with you, Mother.

MARY (*helping her in*): I'm so restless.

LITTLE MARY: I don't mind if you kick me. You know, that's the only good thing about divorce; you get to sleep with your mother. (*She kisses her. A pause.*) I taste lipstick.

MARY: I haven't washed yet. Good night, darling.

LITTLE MARY: You know, you're a very sympathetic mother.

MARY: Am I?

LITTLE MARY: Oh, yes. So would you just tickle my back?

MARY: All right. But go to sleep— (*A pause.*)

LITTLE MARY: She's so silly!

MARY: Who?

LITTLE MARY: Crystal.

MARY: Ssh—

LITTLE MARY: I told Daddy so to-night.

MARY: Oh, you mustn't hurt Daddy's feelings.

LITTLE MARY: Mother?

MARY: Sssh!

LITTLE MARY: I think Daddy doesn't love her as much as you any more.

MARY: What makes you think so, Mary?

LITTLE MARY: He told me so after I saw Crystal.

MARY: What?

LITTLE MARY: But he said I mustn't tell you because, naturally, why do you care how he feels. (*A pause.*) Oh, don't stop tickling, Mother. (*A pause.*) Mother?

MARY: Yes?

LITTLE MARY: What's anyone want with a telephone in the bathroom?

MARY: I don't know. Sssh!

LITTLE MARY: Crystal has one. She was awful mad when I walked in on her while she was talking.

MARY: Sleep, Mary!

LITTLE MARY: Mother, who's the Duchess of Windsor?

MARY: What a question!

LITTLE MARY: Well, Crystal said on the telephone if somebody else was a Countess, she was the Duchess of Windsor!

MARY: Really!

LITTLE MARY: Good night, Mother.

MARY: Good night, baby. (*A pause.*)

LITTLE MARY: I wonder if it was the same man you had for dinner.

MARY: Maybe, ssh!

LITTLE MARY: I thought so.

MARY (*curiously*): If who was the same man?

LITTLE MARY: Crystal was talking to, so lovey-dovey.

MARY (*protestingly*): Oh, Mary!

LITTLE MARY: Well, the front part was the same, Mother.

MARY (*a pause*): The front part of what?

LITTLE MARY: His name, Mother!

MARY (*taking her by the shoulders*): What are you talking about?

LITTLE MARY: That man Crystal was talking to in the bath-tub.

MARY (*half shaking her*): Mary, what do you mean?

LITTLE MARY: I mean his front name was *Buck*, Mother! (MARY *gets quickly out of bed, rings bell on table.*) Oh, Mother, what are you doing?

MARY: Go to sleep, darling. (*Begins to pull on her stockings.*)

LITTLE MARY: Grown-ups are so sudden. Are you dressing?

MARY: Yes, Mary.

LITTLE MARY: You forgot you were invited to a party?

MARY: Almost, Mary.

LITTLE MARY: What are you going to do when you get there, Mother?

MARY: I don't know yet. But I've got to do something.

LITTLE MARY: Well, have a good time! (*Rolls over. Then suddenly sits up.*) Mother?

MARY: Yes?

LITTLE MARY: I remember now I had something to tell you!

MARY (*eagerly*): Yes?

LITTLE MARY (*dolefully*): I was awfully rude to Crystal.

MARY: I'll forgive you this time. (*Enter JANE.*)

JANE: You ring, ma'am?

MARY: Yes. My evening dress, Jane, and a taxi—and don't stand there gaping! Hurry! Hurry!

CURTAIN

SCENE III

Later, the same night. The Powder Room at the Casino Roof. The decoration is rich, tawdry and modernistic. Right, a swinging door from the lobby. Left, another to the washrooms. The rest of the wall-space, left and right, is taken up by counter-like dressing-tables and mirrors. The rear wall is a great window overlooking the glitter of midnight Manhattan. An over-stuffed sofa and an armchair upholstered in modernistic fabric. Near the door, right, a screen hides the coat-rack. By this, a chair for SADIE, a little old woman in a black maid's uniform and apron. As the curtain rises, SADIE is reading a tabloid, which she puts down when two flashily dressed GIRLS enter from the lobby. They check their wraps.

FIRST GIRL: It's jammed.

SECOND GIRL: Oh, my boy-friend'll get a table.

[*Enter two society women. They move directly across the stage to the washroom.*]

FIRST WOMAN: My dear, won't he let you?

SECOND WOMAN: No, he won't.

FIRST WOMAN: How incredibly foul!

SECOND WOMAN: I'm heartbroken. But I have to be philosophical; after all, missing one

winter in Palm Beach really won't kill me.

[Enter "CIGARETTES," a pretty girl in a white satin blouse and short black skirt. She carries a tray of cigarettes.]

FIRST GIRL (*moving left*): Thought you and the boy friend had a row?

SECOND GIRL: We did.

FIRST GIRL: What about?

SECOND GIRL: His wife.

FIRST GIRL: His wife? What right has she got to butt in?

SECOND GIRL: He's got some cock-eyed idea that after twenty years he can't kick her out. (*They exit, left.*)

CIGARETTES: Jeepers, why don't they get sick of this joint night after night! Same music, same act, same faces.

SADIE: They like familiarity. It gives them confidence.

CIGARETTES: I'll say they like familiarity. Most of them shoving around that floor would be more comfortable with each other in bed.

SADIE: In bed? If they was to get that over, what would they use for conversation? (*Enter a DOWAGER and a DEBUTANTE, right. They move directly across stage.*)

DOWAGER: —dancing like that! What can those boys think of you?

DEBUTANTE (*wearily*): Oh, Mother.

DOWAGER: Guzzling champagne like that! After all I spent on your education!

DEBUTANTE: Oh, Mother.

DOWAGER: It's one thing to come out. It's quite another to go under the table! (*They exit, left.*)

SADIE: Getting married, dearie?

CIGARETTES (*sinking, very tired, on the arm of a chair*): As soon as Mike gets a job. It ain't fair! Why, we could get married and have a family on that coat—— Sadie, wh'd'ya say if I was to tell you I'm a Commyanist?

SADIE: I'd say ya was bats. I was a Townsendite. Where'd it get me? (*Enter the COUNTESS, piloted by NANCY and MIRIAM. She is tight and tearful. MIRIAM and NANCY get her, with some difficulty, to the sofa.*)

COUNTESS (*tacking*): How could Buck do such a thing to me! Oh, the Dr. Jekyll! The Mr. Hyde! Which was which?

MIRIAM: Pipe down or you'll put an awful dent in his career, Flora.

COUNTESS: What of my career? I've had five husbands. Buck's the first one who ever told me what he really thought of me—in public.

NANCY: It takes all kinds of husbands to round out a career like yours, Flora.

COUNTESS: He told me he'd been deceiving me for months. Right in the middle of the "Organ-Grinder." (*Kicks off shoes.*) Oh, I feel so—superfluous!

MIRIAM (*to SADIE*): A bromo-seltzer.

COUNTESS: Bromo-seltzer? Qu'est-que c'est que ça?

NANCY: It will settle your—superfluity. Flora, did he tell you the lady's name.

COUNTESS (*indignant*): Certainly not, Nancy. He's not that drunk.

MIRIAM (*as SADIE exits, right*): And another drink for Mr. Winston!

COUNTESS: No, Miriam. He wouldn't tell me her name, because she's a married woman. Buck is very proletarian, but he's not a bounder. He just said *she* was a natural blonde.

NANCY: That ought to narrow down the field considerably.

COUNTRESS: He said she was pretty as a painted wagon.

MIRIAM: Oh, you're not such a bad calliope. Snap out of it, Flora. You know, you're going to forgive him.

COUNTRESS (*firmly*): I'd forgive unfaithfulness, but not base ingratitude. I rescued him from those prairies. I married him. What thanks do I get? (*Wailing*) He says he'll be a cock-eyed coyote if he'll herd an old beef like me back to the coast!

NANCY: Let this be your lesson. Don't let your next husband become financially independent of you.

COUNTRESS: Now, don't lecture me, Nancy. Every time I marry I learn something. This has taught me once and for all—you can't expect noblesse oblige from a cowboy—— (*Sitting up*) Ohhh, my eyes! They're full of mascara.

NANCY (*helping her off the couch. To MIRIAM*): We've got to get her home. Get Buck, and meet us in the lobby.

MIRIAM (*exits, right*): We're headin' for the last round-up!

COUNTRESS: If there's a telephone in here I'm going to call up Mr. Goldwyn. (*Exits, left, with NANCY, as SADIE, with a bromo-seltzer, enters, right, followed by CIGARETTES.*)

CIGARETTES: What's it all about?

SADIE (*picks up COUNTRESS's shoes, as she crosses, left*): Some man.

CIGARETTES: Bet he isn't worth it.

SADIE: You can always collect on that one. (*Exits, left, as re-enter, left, the DOWAGER and the DEBUTANTE.*)

DOWAGER: —Laughing and joking with those boys like that !

DEBUTANTE: Yes, Mother.

DOWAGER: What can they think of you ?

DEBUTANTE: Yes, Mother.

DOWAGER: And don't think I didn't overhear that Princeton boy call me an old drizzle-puss, either ! (*Exits, right.*)

SADIE (*enters, left; to CIGARETTES*): She wants gin in her bromo-seltzer. (*Enter MARY and MIRIAM, right.*)

MIRIAM (*protesting*): Crystal's not in here. I don't think she's in the joint.

MARY: She's coming. I know it.

MIRIAM: So what are you going to do when you find her ? (*SADIE takes MARY's wrap.*)

MARY: I don't know. But I've got to find her to-night. Buck's going to Hollywood in the morning.

MIRIAM: Say, why don't you settle this matter with Stephen ?

MARY: I have no proof, I tell you ! But if Buck is as drunk as you say, he'll give away something.

MIRIAM: Listen, he's been trying all night to give Flora away to the doorman. Got a twenty-dollar bill ?

MARY: Yes.

MIRIAM: That'll lock him in the men's room till we need him. (*Exits, right, with MARY, as enter, left, the two SOCIETY WOMEN. They cross the stage.*)

FIRST WOMAN: Not three pounds ?

SECOND WOMAN: Three pounds !

FIRST WOMAN: How divine ! Aren't you ecstatic?

SECOND WOMAN: Yes, but it's the moral satisfaction. Just bananas and milk for one whole

week ! That called for enormous character !
(*They exit, right.*)

CIGARETTES (*to SADIE*): Enormous character !
Well, she'll need it, all right. Comes the Revolution, she'll diet plenty ! (*Enter PEGGY and EDITH, right. They powder, at the mirror, right.*)

PEGGY : I wish I hadn't come.

EDITH : Well, your husband didn't want you to.

PEGGY (*goes for her wrap*) : Flora was disgusting !

EDITH : But it was funny. Even the kettle-drummer was laughing.

PEGGY : You never miss anything. (*SADIE gives EDITH and PEGGY their wraps.*)

EDITH : My dear, who could stand the life we lead without a sense of humour ? But Flora is a fool. Always remember, Peggy, it's matrimonial suicide to be jealous when you have a really good reason.

PEGGY : Edith, don't you ever get tired of giving advice ?

EDITH : Listen, Peggy, I'm the only happy woman you know. Why ? I don't ask Phelps or any man to understand me. How could he ? I'm a woman. (*Pulls down her corset.*) And I don't try to understand them. They're just animals. Who am I to quarrel with the way God made them ? I've got security. So I put my faith in the law. And I say : " What the hell ? " And let nature take its course—it's going to, anyway. (*They exit, right, as enter the two GIRLS, left.*)

SECOND GIRL (*powdering at the mirror, left*) : —So there we were on Sattiday night and it's Atlantic City. And he says : " I gotta go home to-morrow, baby ! " And I says : (*Pulls up her stockings.*) " Why dja got to ? " And he says : " My wife always expects me home on Easter Sunday. " So I says : " What's she expect ya to do ? Lay an egg ? "

FIRST GIRL: They got no sentiment. (*Enter, right, a GIRL IN DISTRESS. The shoulder-strap of her very low décolletage has broken.*)

GIRL IN DISTRESS (*to SADIE*): Have you got a safety-pin? I was never so embarrassed! (*SADIE gets pin.*)

SECOND GIRL (*crossing, right*): So I told him, "I had a great career until you made me give up the stage, you lunkhead. For what? A couple of cheesy diamond bracelets? A lousy car, which every time it breaks down you got to have the parts shipped over from Italy." (*The GIRLS exit.*)

GIRL IN DISTRESS: So he says, "Don't look now, you've just dropped something!" (*Enter CRYSTAL and SYLVIA, right. They move to check their wraps with SADIE.*)

SADIE: Just a minute, please.

SYLVIA (*they go to mirror, left*): Stephen is in a mood.

CRYSTAL: He can take it and like it.

GIRL IN DISTRESS (*to SADIE*): Does it show now?

SADIE: Not what it did before, miss.

GIRL IN DISTRESS: Thank you. (*She exits, right. SADIE takes CRYSTAL's and SYLVIA's wraps.*)

CRYSTAL: Is my mouth on straight?

SYLVIA: Crystal, you didn't come here to see somebody, did you?

CRYSTAL: Oh, Sylvia, can't you lay off that for a minute? (*Enter MARY and MIRIAM, left.*)

MARY (*moving forward resolutely*): Mrs. Haines, this is a great pleasure!

CRYSTAL (*turning*): I beg your pardon?

MARY: Such a lovely party! I was afraid you weren't coming. (*Introducing CRYSTAL and MIRIAM, MIRIAM and SYLVIA*) Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Haines, Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Fowler.

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EDITH : Listen, Peggy, I'm the only happy woman you know. Why ? I don't ask Phelps or any man to understand me. How could he ? I'm a woman. (*Pulls down her corset.*) And I don't try to understand them. They're just animals. Who am I to quarrel with the way God made them ? I've got security. So I put my faith in the law. And I say : " What the hell ? " And let nature take its course—it's going to, anyway. (*They exit, right, as enter the two GIRLS, left.*)

SECOND GIRL (*powdering at the mirror, left*) : —So there we were on Sattiday night and it's Atlantic City. And he says : " I gotta go home to-morrow, baby ! " And I says : (*Pulls up her stockings.*) " Why dja got to ? " And he says : " My wife always expects me home on Easter Sunday." So I says : " What's she expect ya to do ? Lay an egg ? "

FIRST GIRL: They got no sentiment. (*Enter, right, a GIRL IN DISTRESS. The shoulder-strap of her very low décolletage has broken.*)

GIRL IN DISTRESS (*to SADIE*): Have you got a safety-pin? I was never so embarrassed! (*SADIE gets pin.*)

SECOND GIRL (*crossing, right*): So I told him, "I had a great career until you made me give up the stage, you lunkhead. For what? A couple of cheesy diamond bracelets? A lousy car, which every time it breaks down you got to have the parts shipped over from Italy." (*The GIRLS exit.*)

GIRL IN DISTRESS: So he says, "Don't look now, you've just dropped something!" (*Enter CRYSTAL and SYLVIA, right. They move to check their wraps with SADIE.*)

SADIE: Just a minute, please.

SYLVIA (*they go to mirror, left*): Stephen is in a mood.

CRYSTAL: He can take it and like it.

GIRL IN DISTRESS (*to SADIE*): Does it show now?

SADIE: Not what it did before, miss.

GIRL IN DISTRESS: Thank you. (*She exits, right. SADIE takes CRYSTAL's and SYLVIA's wraps.*)

CRYSTAL: Is my mouth on straight?

SYLVIA: Crystal, you didn't come here to see somebody, did you?

CRYSTAL: Oh, Sylvia, can't you lay off that for a minute? (*Enter MARY and MIRIAM, left.*)

MARY (*moving forward resolutely*): Mrs. Haines, this is a great pleasure!

CRYSTAL (*turning*): I beg your pardon?

MARY: Such a lovely party! I was afraid you weren't coming. (*Introducing CRYSTAL and MIRIAM, MIRIAM and SYLVIA*) Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Haines, Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Fowler.

MIRIAM (*graciously*): Chawmed.

SYLVIA (*bridling*): This is humiliating.

MARY: Modern life is complicated. When you came in I was just telling Miriam——

CRYSTAL: Oh, come along, Sylvia. The lady is tight.

SYLVIA: Mary, when did you begin drinking?

MARY (*to* CRYSTAL): Early in the evening, with Mr. Winston. You *know* Mr. Winston, don't you?

CRYSTAL (*at the door*): I'm afraid I don't.

SYLVIA: Of course you do, Crystal. I introduced you to him. Don't you remember?

CRYSTAL: Oh, yes, a cocktail party.

MARY: Well, he's in the lobby now, waiting for someone, Mrs. Haines, and drunker than you can possibly imagine. You'd find him very difficult to handle, in front of Stephen. (CRYSTAL *suddenly changes her mind about going into the lobby, moves toward the washroom.*)

SYLVIA: Crystal, where are you going?

CRYSTAL: I won't stand here and listen to drivel!

MARY: I wouldn't go in there, either, Mrs. Haines. His wife's in there now, having hysterics. She's found out that Buck has been deceiving her.

CRYSTAL: Really! What has that to do with me?

MARY: A good deal, I'm afraid. You seem to be the woman.

SYLVIA (*delighted*): Why, Crystal!—*Are you?*

CRYSTAL: If he used my name, it's a lie! He's just the cheap sort—I'll tell my husband.

MARY: You'll have to. To-morrow it will be common gossip. I don't think Stephen will like it.

SYLVIA: Oh, Crystal, he's going to loathe it !
But my psycho-analyst is going to adore it.

CRYSTAL (*going to her*) : What are you trying to do ? Pin something on me, in front of witnesses ?

SYLVIA: Whatever she's driving at, Crystal—
(*pointing to MIRIAM*)—that little tramp put her up to it !

CRYSTAL (*to SYLVIA*) : Keep out of this !

MIRIAM: Yeah, check it, Sylvia, we're minor league this evening.

CRYSTAL: All right, Mrs. Haines, you've been listening to the ravings of a conceited fool. What did he tell you ?

MARY (*playing for time, or inspiration*) : Really, Mrs. Haines, this is very embarrassing.

CRYSTAL (*brazening it out*) : Yes, Mrs. Haines, isn't it ? Exactly what do you think you know about me ?

MARY: Everything ! (*A pause. CRYSTAL laughs.*)

CRYSTAL: Then why are you standing here talking to me ? You ought to be outside spilling it to Stephen. You're bluffing. Come along, Sylvia !

MARY (*also moving to door. CRYSTAL stops*) : That's very good advice. I will tell Stephen.

CRYSTAL: Oh, he wouldn't believe you.

SYLVIA: Oh, you can't tell, Crystal ! He's terribly fond of Mary.

CRYSTAL: Now get this straight, Mrs. Haines. I like what I got, and I'm going to keep it. You handed me your husband on a silver platter. (*Enter NANCY, left.*) But I'm not returning the compliment. I can't be stampeded by gossip. What you believe and what Stephen believes will cut no ice in a divorce court. You need proof and you haven't got it. When Mr. Winston comes to his senses, he'll apologise. And Stephen

will have no choice, but to accept—my explanations. Now that's that ! Good night !

MARY (*desperately*): I hope Mrs. Winston will accept your explanations.

CRYSTAL: What have I got to explain to her ?

MARY (*with a conviction she does not feel*): What about the apartment ?

CRYSTAL: What apartment ?

MARY: You know as well as I do.

CRYSTAL: Oh, stop trying to put two and two together——

MARY: Oh, Mrs. Winston did that. She had you watched—she's seen you both.

CRYSTAL (*defiantly*): Where ?

MARY: Going in, and coming out !

CRYSTAL: Going in and coming out *where* ? (*A pause.*) You're lying !

SYLVIA (*warningly*): I wouldn't be so sure, Crystal !

MIRIAM: Sounds like the McCoy to me, Crystal.

CRYSTAL: Shut up !

SYLVIA: Oh, Crystal, why didn't you confide in me ? (*CRYSTAL turns to the door again, triumphant.*)

MARY (*dismayed*): Sylvia, didn't she ?

SYLVIA: Certainly *not* ! (*CRYSTAL smiles, very pleased with herself.*) She's the cat that walks alone. (*Goes to CRYSTAL.*) Why, Crystal, I could have told you some place *much safer* than the Gothic Apartments !

CRYSTAL (*exploding*): Why, you big, loud-mouthed idiot !

SYLVIA: How dare you !

CRYSTAL: I'd like to slap your stupid face.

SYLVIA (*backing up*): Oh, Mary, how dare she ?

MIRIAM: Oh, I've got a job to do on Flora. (*She pats SYLVIA affectionately.*) Kiss you when I get back, Sylvia. (*Exits, left.*)

NANCY: And I'll explain the facts of life to Stephen. (*NANCY exits, right.*)

CRYSTAL (*to MARY, fiercely*): You're trying to break up my marriage!

SYLVIA: The way you did hers, you floosie!

CRYSTAL (*nasty*): Well, maybe you're welcome to my—left-overs.

MARY (*calmly*): I'll take them, thank you.

SYLVIA: Why, Mary, haven't you any *pride*?

MARY: That's right. No, no pride; that's a luxury a woman in love can't afford. (*Enter COUNTESS and MIRIAM, left. MIRIAM goes to SADIE, gets the COUNTESS's and her own wraps.*)

COUNTESS (*rushing for CRYSTAL*): Oh, mon Dieu, mon Dieu!

MARY (*stopping her*): Flora, it's really too bad——

COUNTESS (*to CRYSTAL*): You—you painted wagon!

CRYSTAL: So you're determined to have a scandal, Mrs. Haines.

COUNTESS: I'm the one who's going to have the scandal. Why, Mary, she's no more a blonde naturelle than I am. What's the creature's name? Miriam forgot to tell me.

MARY: Mrs. Stephen Haines, currently.

COUNTESS: Is that the thing Stephen left you for? Well, chérie, all I can say is, you're an idiot! I hope I never live to see the day when an obvious piece like that conquers *me* on the champs d'amour! (*She exits, right, followed by MIRIAM.*)

CRYSTAL (*to MARY*): That damn' fool didn't know. (*SADIE gives MARY her wrap.*)

MARY: I'm afraid she didn't. (*Enter NANCY, right.*)

NANCY: There's a gentleman called Mr. Haines. He says he's been waiting a long time for his wife—— (*CRYSTAL moves to get her wrap.*)

MARY (*stepping between her and SADIE*): Tell him, I am coming. (*Exit NANCY quickly.*)

SYLVIA: Mary, what a dirty female trick !

CRYSTAL: Yes ! From the great, noble little woman ! You're just a cat, like all the rest of us !

MARY: Well, I've had two years to sharpen my claws. (*Waves her hand gaily to SYLVIA.*) Jungle-rd, Sylvia ! Good night, ladies ! (*Exits.*)

CURTAIN

PEOPLE IN LOVE

Arthur Reid

PEOPLE IN LOVE

A Light Comedy

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Browne Ltd, 10 Golden Square, London, W 1, to whom all
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made in writing.*

First presented by Maurice Browne at the
Arts Theatre Club on Thursday, May 27th,
1937.

ORIGINAL CAST

<i>Armand Vaughan</i>	HENRY HEWITT
<i>Julia Britton</i>	ELLEN POLLOCK
<i>Helen Winton</i>	ENA BURRILL
<i>David Wright (Nicky)</i>	CYRIL RITCHARD
<i>Charles Trent</i>	JACK ALLEN
<i>Bristow</i>	JOHN DODSWORTH
<i>Jenny</i>	SUSAN TAYLOR

Produced by MARJORIE MORRIS

PEOPLE IN THE PLAY

ARMAND VAUGHAN

JULIA BRITTON His sister.

HELEN WINTON

DAVID WRIGHT (NICKY)

CHARLES TRENT

BRISTOW Julia's butler.

JENNY Julia's maid.

ACT I

Living-room in Mrs. Winton's Flat, London,
W.I.

Midnight in spring.

ACT II

Julia Britton's House in Surrey.

Three months later.

SCENE I: 5.0 p.m.

SCENE II: After dinner. The same night.

ACT III

Same as Act II.

The same night. A few minutes later.

TIME: The Present. .

ACT I

SCENE: *Living-room in the London, W., flat of HELEN WINTON. It is pleasantly and comfortably furnished. Facing us are two French windows which lead on to a balcony, but the curtains are now closed as it is about midnight. On one side of the room is a fireplace in which a fire is smouldering; on the opposite wall a door leads to the hall. A sofa—long and comfortable—at right angles to the fire, faces us. Cigarettes and drinking impedimenta are conveniently placed on a small table.*

As the curtain rises, a clock strikes twelve. The door slowly opens and a man enters. He looks around cautiously to assure himself that he is alone. He pulls the curtains and the moonlight shows us that his clothes—though well cut—are shabby. The same might be said about his face. He looks hungry and tired and unhappy. He walks to the fire, kicks the embers into a flame, and warms himself. He notices the drinks and he helps himself to a stiff whiskey and soda which he sips with evident enjoyment.

With the glass in his hand, he walks around the room inspecting the various "objets d'art," and putting the smaller and more valuable ones in his pockets.

Suddenly, the telephone rings. The MAN looks at it helplessly for a moment, and, as the ringing continues, he picks up the receiver.

MAN: Hello . . . Hello . . . Mrs. Who . . . ? I'm afraid you have the wrong number. . . . 'This is the Battersea Dogs' Home. . . . Not at all. . . .

He replaces the receiver and sighs with relief. Suddenly he hears a noise in the hall. He gets up hurriedly, looks around nervously, and slips behind the curtains that conceal the French windows. (He has left his hat on a chair near the door where he put it when he first came in.)

Almost immediately the door opens and HELEN WINTON enters, closely followed by CHARLES

TRENT. *They are in evening dress.* HELEN WINTON is so well groomed, well dressed and self-assured that it would be impertinent to doubt her beauty.

CHARLES is a typical product of the English Public School System, Sandhurst, and the Army. He is in love with HELEN, and it is obvious to us, and to her, that he will take the first opportunity that he gets, or that he can make, to tell her so.

HELEN goes straight to the 'phone and picks up the receiver.

HELEN: Hello . . . Hello. . . . Charles, put on the lights. (CHARLES switches on the lights.) No, it wasn't my 'phone. It's dead . . . making altogether the wrong noises. (She replaces the receiver.)

CHARLES: I'm sure we heard it when we were outside.

HELEN: I don't know anyone who would dare ring me up at this time of night.

CHARLES (attempting a compliment): Probably some young man at the party wanting to propose to you.

HELEN: Charles! You do pay the most Edwardian compliments. That *was* meant as a compliment, wasn't it?

CHARLES: It was.

HELEN: Well . . . fix yourself a drink and you'll feel much better. . . . You can fix me one too—rather a large one. I think we need it after that party.

CHARLES (at the drink table): It was a nice party. I enjoyed it.

HELEN: It was a horrible party. Harriet's always are. . . .

CHARLES: If you feel like that about them, why do you go?

HELEN: That's what I keep on asking myself

while I'm at them. . . . Why does anyone go ?
. . . . Why do *you* go ?

CHARLES (*handing her her drink*): I go because you go.

HELEN (*frowning*): Oh, Charles ! Edwardian again ! You really must guard against it. . . . Take a big drink and relax.

CHARLES: I don't want to relax, Helen. . . .

HELEN (*heading him off*): All right, my dear, you don't have to.

[*She pokes the fire.*]

CHARLES: It was nice of you to let me come up for a drink. . . . I didn't get a chance of talking to you at the party. . . . You're not tired, are you ?

HELEN: No, no, not very. . . . I wonder if tonight's party was more boring than most or if—in my widowhood—I've turned against parties.

CHARLES: You're not very kind to poor Harriet.

HELEN: I don't have to be. Do you know, Charles, lately I think I've developed an extra sense . . . a sense of futility. I don't think I'll ever get what I want.

CHARLES: Why is that ?

HELEN: Because I don't know what I want.

CHARLES: In a way that's what I want to talk to you about.

HELEN: Oh, is it ?

CHARLES: I love you, Helen. . . . You know that ?

HELEN (*weakly*): Yes, my dear. I know it.

CHARLES: Will you marry me ? I know it must be hard to think of anyone else after Philip . . . but he's been dead for more than a year now . . . and . . . and I do love you so much.

HELEN: Oh, Charles, please !

CHARLES: It's painful to talk about, I know . . . when you were as happy as you were with him, but, my dear, you're young and very beautiful. You have your own life to live. It mustn't end with his.

HELEN (*shaking her head*): No, Charles. You're sweet . . . but I'm afraid it's no use.

CHARLES: What do you mean . . . it's no use ?

HELEN: I'm terribly fond of you, and think of you as one of the best friends that I shall ever have. But marriage is an entirely different thing, isn't it ?

[CHARLES *does not answer*.

Isn't it ?

CHARLES (*sulkily*): I don't see why our being good friends should prevent us being happily married. It ought to help.

HELEN: It doesn't. I know. It didn't before.

CHARLES: What nonsense, Helen ! You and Philip were very happy.

HELEN: We were very good *friends*. Oh, Charles . . . I don't want to talk about it . . . especially to you. . . . But I wasn't happy . . . not really happy. I was Philip's "best pal." . . . God, what an expression ! I'm sure he felt he was betraying our friendship every time he fulfilled his obligations as a husband.

CHARLES: Helen !

HELEN: That's why I can't marry *you*, Charles. . . . You see, I've been married to you for years—not you personally, but your type. (*She smiles.*) I don't know what it is about the English army. You may all be different before you go in, but—once there—you're all exactly the same. It's like pouring men into a mould. You all come out identical.

CHARLES (*ruefully*): With bits of the mould sticking to us?

HELEN (*laughs*): No, Charles, you're very nice. . . .

CHARLES: But rather dull?

HELEN: I didn't say that . . . not dull, just over-reliable. . . .

CHARLES: Army men are notoriously unfaithful!

HELEN: I haven't found them so.

CHARLES: You talk as though infidelity were desirable in a husband. . . .

HELEN: I almost think it is. . . . Next time, I want a husband whom I can mistrust, and who drives me absolutely insane with jealousy. It's very necessary if a marriage is to be anything but . . . paralytically platonic.

CHARLES (*gruffly*): There you are, Helen, laughing at me! . . . Won't you be serious? The first essentials of a successful marriage are complete trust and understanding. . . .

HELEN: A *successful* marriage, yes! But who wants a successful marriage? . . . Love is more important than marriage—anyone who's been married knows that. If you don't have to fight for a man's love, and use every available weapon to keep it, you begin to think that it's not worth having. That is why a little legalised infidelity would be a good thing in a lot of marriages. . . .

CHARLES (*laughing*): Nonsense, Helen . . . and especially from you. . . .

HELEN (*surprised*): Why especially from me? Oh, I see . . . Philip . . . (*Vehemently*) I'm sick to death of pretending that Philip was a perfect husband. He was nothing of the kind. He was smug and damn dull.

CHARLES (*shocked*): Helen. . . . He's dead. . . .

HELEN: I know—but he was dead when I married him.

CHARLES: You've forgotten how happy you were.

HELEN (*with rising temper*): I haven't forgotten. Oh, we weren't unhappy . . . but, you and I are just as happy now. I suppose Philip and I remained faithful to each other because we were both fastidious, and because no one sufficiently vital intervened. If there had been anyone—either for Philip or myself—I don't think we would have hesitated. I hope not.

[*She puts her empty glass on the side table and straightens the curtains behind which the man is concealed.*]

Now, where was I?

CHARLES (*drily*): I think you'd finished. I hope so. It was about Philip.

HELEN: I'm sorry. You were his friend. I must have annoyed you . . . but, you had annoyed me.

CHARLES (*moving towards her*): I hope I won't annoy you again.

HELEN (*edging away*): I hope so, too.

CHARLES: I love you, Helen. . . . You've got to marry me.

HELEN (*disdainfully*): Got to, Charles? Don't be silly. . . .

[*Suddenly, he takes her in his arms.*]

Let me go. . . . You look ridiculous.

CHARLES: No one can see.

HELEN: That doesn't stop your looking ridiculous!

[*He tries to kiss her. She struggles.*]

Are you drunk ?

CHARLES: A little bit. Will you marry me ?

HELEN (*sadly*): You men are very disappointing, Charles. . . .

CHARLES: I'm not interested in men.

HELEN (*lightly*): That's fairly obvious !

CHARLES: Will you marry me ?

HELEN: No, Charles.

CHARLES: Why not ?

HELEN: Because . . . because I'm going to marry someone else.

[CHARLES *is so surprised that he lets her go.*

CHARLES: Who ? . . . Who are you going to marry ?

HELEN: No one you know, Charles.

CHARLES: How long has it been arranged ?

HELEN (*carelessly*): Oh . . . not very long.

CHARLES: What's his name ?

HELEN: Nicholas—I call him “Nicky”—for short.

CHARLES: Why ?

HELEN: I can't think why. (*She smiles.*) Really, Charles . . . why all these questions ?

CHARLES: Because I don't believe you.

HELEN (*mocking*): My dear Charles, what an evening you're having ! You assault me . . . shout at me . . . call me a liar. I don't know what your next move will be.

CHARLES (*shamefacedly*): I'm sorry, Helen. I know I'm behaving badly . . . but I don't believe there is such a person as this Nicky. I've never met him.

HELEN (*coldly*): You've probably never met the President of the French Republic, but that's a very poor reason to doubt his existence.

CHARLES: I think he's just been invented by you as a ruse to get rid of me.

[CHARLES *sits down firmly on the sofa.*

HELEN: The ruse seems to have failed. (*She picks up the hat which the MAN dropped.*) Is this your hat?

CHARLES (*shocked. It is a very shabby hat*): My dear!

HELEN: Charles, there's someone in this room!

CHARLES: There's you and there's me.

HELEN: Someone else.

CHARLES: Don't be silly!

HELEN: Don't you think you'd better pull yourself together and have a look?

CHARLES: My dear, there's no one.

HELEN: Charles, if that isn't your hat, then there's someone in this room. . . .

CHARLES (*unperturbed*): You can't get rid of me like that. . . . Who is it, Helen?

[HELEN *is furious. She looks around the room and goes straight to the curtains and pulls them, revealing the MAN, who steps into the room.*

CHARLES *is amazed—so, in fact, is HELEN, but at the moment she is too angry to show it.*

MAN (*without conviction*): Nicky!

HELEN (*smiles delightedly*): Now perhaps you'll believe something I say! . . . What have you been doing out there, Nicky?

MAN: I slipped out to get some air.

HELEN: I see. . . . By the way, this is Captain Trent . . . er . . . Nicky. . . .

| *The men shake hands and exchange greetings.*

CHARLES: How d'you do?

NICKY: How do you do?

CHARLES (*embarrassed*): I thought Helen was pulling my leg about you.

NICKY: Did you?

CHARLES: Yes, rather! I had no idea she was engaged.

NICKY (*with a glance at HELEN*): Nor have many people.

HELEN (*quickly*): It's still a secret. You must help us to keep it, too, Charles.

CHARLES: Yes, I will . . . rather. I say, Helen, I am most frightfully sorry. May I apologise?

HELEN: Oh, that's all right. (*To NICKY*) How did you get in?

NICKY (*hesitates, then*): . . . I had the key, dear. . . .

HELEN (*embarrassed*): Of course.

CHARLES: I think I'll run along now.

NICKY (*hurriedly*): I'll come with you.

HELEN: Stay and have a drink, Nicky.

NICKY (*anxious to escape*): It's getting pretty late.

CHARLES (*taking it as a hint*): Well, I'm going. . . . Good night, er . . .

NICKY: Wright.

CHARLES: I beg your pardon.

NICKY: Wright. . . . My name is Wright.

[HELEN *laughs*.

CHARLES: Good night, Wright! Good night, Helen. . . . Er . . . will you both come and have dinner with me one day next week?

NICKY (*politely*): Thanks very much. I'd like to.

HELEN (*quickly*): I'll let you know, Charles.
(*Explaining*) Nicky may not be here very long.
(*She takes his arm. Gaily*) I'll see you off the premises . . . make sure you don't hide behind the curtains !

[*Exeunt HELEN and CHARLES.*]

CHARLES (*off*): Good night !

[*Left alone, NICKY looks around for a way of escape. HELEN re-enters, laughing.*]

HELEN: Poor Charles ! Thank you for playing up so beautifully !

NICKY: Not at all. . . .

HELEN: By the way, what were you doing there. . . . Wrong flat or Divine Providence ?

NICKY: Neither. . . . I came to steal . . . (*almost apologetic*) you see, I'm a burglar. . . .

HELEN: Oh ! . . .

NICKY: Don't be frightened.

HELEN: I'm not frightened.

NICKY: Oh !

HELEN: Surprised perhaps, but not frightened. I was a bit startled when I first realised you were there . . . but I was so angry with Charles. Then, when I saw you, you looked so much more frightened than I felt. Besides . . . you seemed to be a gentleman.

NICKY: Thank you.

HELEN (*coldly*): It's not necessarily a compliment, you know. What have you taken ?

NICKY: Not very much. . . . I didn't have time. I only just arrived before you did.

HELEN: You must have heard everything we said, then.

NICKY: I couldn't help it.

HELEN: What did you think? Did you think I behaved badly?

NICKY: You were magnificent! But he'll never forgive you!

HELEN: Oh, yes he will . . . and he'll apologise—and so he should! But I mustn't bore you with my troubles. (*She smiles.*) So you're a burglar!

NICKY: Yes!

HELEN: Won't you have a drink?

NICKY: Thank you. (*He hands her the glass which he used at the beginning of the Act.*) This is my glass. . . .

HELEN: Oh!

NICKY: I want rather more than a drink, though!

HELEN (*startled*): What do you mean?

NICKY: Your jewels!

HELEN (*relieved*): Oh, I thought for a moment you were being tiresome . . . like Charles. . . . I suppose you'd better have them . . . here's your drink!

[*She begins to remove her jewels. She pauses.*]

NICKY: What is it?

HELEN: I can't remember if I paid the insurance or not. . . . Oh, well . . . I can send them a cheque in the morning . . . (*She pauses again.*) What's to prevent me sending for the police?

NICKY: I am. . . .

HELEN: After you've gone, though?

NICKY (*shrugs*): Your reputation.

HELEN: What do you mean?

NICKY: I'd say you gave them to me. Charles thinks we're engaged. He'd . . .

HELEN: He'd lie like anything.

NICKY: He might not be so accommodating.

HELEN (*angry*): What a horrible person you are !

NICKY: I'm sorry.

HELEN (*icily, hands him her jewels*): You'd better go now. . . .

NICKY: Thank you.

[*He moves towards the door, and as he does so he stumbles. He takes hold of a chair for support.*]

I'm sorry . . . I feel a little dizzy . . . do you mind if I sit down for a moment. . . . I'm rather tired. (*He sits on the armchair.*)

HELEN (*coldly*): Isn't this your first job to-night, then ?

NICKY: This is my very first job . . . ever. . . .

HELEN: Oh ! . . .

NICKY (*quietly*): You don't believe me ?

HELEN: I'd be a fool—wouldn't I ?—to believe every word a thief told me. But I shouldn't let that worry you. . . .

NICKY: It doesn't. . . . Yet, if I were a . . . Company Promoter, you'd believe quite a lot of what I'd say, and I'd get your money as easily . . . even more easily than I get your jewels. The ethics are the same . . . the difference is that I need the money.

HELEN: If you need the money, why don't you work for it ?

NICKY (*wearily*): My dear lady . . . I'd willingly do so. . . . Unfortunately the jobs available for men like me . . . without experience, and with all the advantages of a University education. . . . are remarkably few. (*Bitterly*) You wouldn't believe how tiresome poverty can be.

HELEN: I thought that poor people were honest.

NICKY: Honest people are poor. . . . I'm sick of being poor . . . sick of being honest . . . you despise me, don't you?

HELEN: I . . .

NICKY (*stands up and sways unsteadily*): Well, perhaps you are right. God, I feel awful! It's that drink. (*Almost to himself.*)

HELEN (*more kindly*): Are you hungry?

NICKY (*who knows the meaning of the word*): Hungry!

HELEN (*briskly*): You'd better sit down. I'll get you something to eat. . . . (*Almost reluctantly*) I'm beginning to feel sorry for you.

[*She goes to the door. He makes a gesture as if to stop her.*

(*Impatiently*) It's all right . . . I won't send for the police.

[*Exit HELEN. Left alone, NICKY gets up and moves to the door—obviously contemplating leaving before she returns. Apparently he decides not to do so, for he adjusts his tie in front of the mirror and sits on the sofa.*

HELEN (*off*): D'you like chicken?

NICKY: I think I can manage some.

[*HELEN re-enters with a tray laden with the contents of the ice-box.*

HELEN: There! It's not very much, I'm afraid . . . but you shouldn't eat too much on a completely empty stomach. Should you? It ties itself into knots if you do.

[*She puts the tray down on a small table in front of the sofa.*

NICKY: It looks splendid to me. . . . You're very kind.

HELEN: Go on . . . eat ! (*She watches him in silence for a moment.*) I don't want to seem patronising or anything . . . but I would like to do something for you.

NICKY (*smiling*): But you've already done more for me than anyone has for a long time. . . . All this food . . . and drink . . . and pity . . . and I've got your jewels in my pocket. What more can a man want ?

HELEN: Is your name really Wright ?

NICKY: Yes. (*He smiles.*) Funny, isn't it ?

HELEN: But, not Nicholas ?

NICKY: No. David.

HELEN: That's nicer than Nicholas. You've had bad luck ?

NICKY: I have. (*Grimly.*) I don't usually talk about it. . . . (*He points to his empty glass.*) It must be that whiskey !

HELEN: Have some more ?

NICKY: Thank you.

HELEN (*taking his glass*): I'll pour it. I want some myself.

NICKY: It's a long time since I've had whiskey to drink . . . it's a long time since I've sat down comfortably and warmly like this. . . . (*He sighs, looking into the fire.*)

[HELEN hands him his drink.

Thank you. . . . Great stuff, drink . . . but it loosens the tongue !

HELEN: And the morals ?

NICKY (*quietly*): That's not true . . . that's not why I'm here.

HELEN: I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

NICKY: Didn't you ?

HELEN: I'm sorry. It was rotten.

NICKY: It's all right. . . . I rather envy the man who's drunk his way to the bottom—at least he's had some fun getting there.

HELEN (*shyly*): Won't you tell me about yourself?

NICKY (*ruefully*): Not the story of my life?

HELEN: Please.

NICKY: It's very dull. . . . A story of failure.

HELEN: Failure can be more interesting than success.

NICKY: Not in this case.

[HELEN *smiles at him*.

Where shall I begin?

HELEN: "Begin at the beginning—and go right on till you come to the end: then stop."

NICKY (*recognising the quotation*): *Alice in Wonderland*! This is just as fantastic, my sitting here. . . . Well . . . I was born. My childhood was very dull, because it was very happy. I was a good boy—went to a good school—then Cambridge. A few years later my mother and father died and I went to Africa—to farm.

HELEN: Whereabouts?

NICKY: Kenya.

HELEN: Did you know Robin Penhurst?

NICKY: Yes—faintly. He had a farm not far from mine!

HELEN: Well, now isn't that extraordinary? What a coincidence! Well? Go on.

NICKY: It was quite a success. The failure comes later. I worked hard . . . made money . . . had a good time. It lasted quite a while.

HELEN (*listening with growing interest*): Then . . . ?

NICKY: Things started. I got ill.

HELEN: What was the matter ?

NICKY: Something you've never even heard of. The bug that got into me was so obscure and rare that I think they had to invent a special name for it. Anyhow, the doctors out there knew nothing about it, so I came back to give the specialists a treat. They had lots of fun. Consultations and operations galore . . . even a few demonstrations. After about eighteen months I was cured. I was also broke and they wouldn't let me go back. So I sold the farm and started looking for a job here. That was four years ago. With very few interruptions, I've been looking ever since. So to-day . . . that's all.

HELEN (*quietly*): Thank you. I don't blame you for . . . for wanting to steal.

NICKY: I don't blame myself.

HELEN: Those four years must have been horrible.

NICKY: You might call them experience—a succession of failures. . . .

HELEN: Have you no friends ?

NICKY: . . . And few illusions.

HELEN (*almost tenderly*): Poor Nicholas ! Poor Mr. Wright !

NICKY: So you believe my story ?

HELEN: Of course.

NICKY (*bitterly*): You'd be a fool—wouldn't you—to believe everything a thief told you.

HELEN: You shouldn't have let me say that.

NICKY: Why not ? It's true. I am a thief. . . . People who live in glass houses . . .

HELEN (*interrupting*): People who live in glass houses shouldn't live in glass houses. I'm ashamed of myself. Will you let me apologise?

NICKY: Gladly.

HELEN: Will you let me help you?

NICKY: You have.

HELEN: Taking my jewels isn't going to help you. Can't you see it's . . . it's just another step down?

NICKY: That's my general direction.

HELEN: I could get you some work.

NICKY (*bitterly*): Could you? . . .

HELEN (*interrupting, desperately*): Really I could! Can't you see I want to be your friend?

NICKY: A minute ago you wanted to be my fiancée.

HELEN: That was a joke.

NICKY: Isn't this?

HELEN: No.

[She speaks with such vehemence that they pause and look at each other for a moment.]

I could get you a job. Armand Vaughan, the banker, is a friend of mine. He'd give you something.

NICKY: I'd have more chance of robbing a bank than of working in one. (*He shakes his head.*) No . . . it wouldn't work.

HELEN: Why not?

NICKY: Look at me. . . . Do I look the sort of man that could earn an honest living?

HELEN: Yes.

NICKY: I've been nothing but a tramp for so long that I doubt my ability to be anything else.

HELEN (*scornfully*): You're hopeless.

NICKY: I'm sorry to disappoint you . . . but, to-morrow, when you've thought it all over, you'll realise how impossible it would be. At the same time, I hope you won't altogether regret your charitable impulse. (*He smiles at her.*)

HELEN (*scornfully*): Charitable impulse! I don't want you to take my jewels . . . that's all.

NICKY (*hurt*): Is that all?

HELEN: Isn't it a very good reason?

NICKY: Very good. I congratulate you on the success of your performance. (*Suddenly, handing her the jewels*) Here you are!

HELEN: You'd give them back?

NICKY: Why not? They're not mine.

HELEN: They might be of some real use to you. To me . . . they're just something that adds to my vanity. . . .

NICKY (*roughly*): You're damned inconsistent. Take them. You can add this evening's entertainment to your vanity. (*Puts jewels on the table.*) You've handled me admirably and even managed to revive a conscience or something that I hoped was dead. (*He moves towards the door.*)

HELEN: Where are you going?

NICKY (*with mock heroism*): I'm going to lead an honest life. The reformation won't last but . . . don't be alarmed, I shan't bother you again.

HELEN (*quietly*): Don't go.

NICKY: Why not? What is there to stay for?

HELEN (*sighs*): Oh, very well . . .

[*The telephone rings. They both hurry to answer it. NICKY gets there first.*

DON'T be a fool. (*She takes the receiver from him*) Hello . . . Hello, Julia. What a time to telephone ! Oh . . . (*embarrassed*) Thank you ! How did you hear ? (*Angrily*) He promised not to tell anyone. . . . Of course, I don't mind your knowing but we were going to keep it a secret. . . . (*She looks at NICKY*) No, he's just going. . . . No, no you can't . . . He's tired . . . Yes . . . from Paris this evening ! Um . . . Nicholas Wright, yes. . . . I don't think he is . . . All right, I'll ask him. . . . (*To NICKY*) Are you related to the Worcestershire Wrights ?

NICKY : Whatever you say !

HELEN (*laughs*) : He says not if he can help it ! Yes, he's very funny ! . . . Oh, yes. He is . . . Well, to-morrow, Julia ? He may have to go away . . . to Sweden. . . . You'll see him when he gets back. No, it's out of the question . . . But, darling, I said no . . . no . . . (*She listens and hangs up the receiver. Ruefully*) Oh, Lord !

NICKY : What is it ?

HELEN : Julia Britton is coming up to congratulate us. She's determined to meet you.

NICKY : How did she hear ?

HELEN : Charles went back to the party and told her.

NICKY : I'd better slip away.

HELEN : She'll meet you . . . she lives below. (*Hopelessly*) I'll have to tell her . . . unless . . .

NICKY : Unless what ?

HELEN : Unless you'd mind pretending again. . . .

NICKY (*smiles*) : Of course not. It's the least I can do.

HELEN (*with relief*): Thank you. I'll think of something to tell her to-morrow. Remember . . . you only got back from Paris a few hours ago . . . we met there last month. . . . It was love at first sight.

NICKY (*smiling*): All right.

[*Knocking is heard outside. HELEN walks towards the door.*]

HELEN: My name is Helen Winton.

NICKY (*grins*): And mine is Nicholas Wright !

[*Exit HELEN. She re-enters almost at once accompanied by JULIA BRITTON. JULIA is superb, chic and volatile. She does everything with overwhelming enthusiasm. At the moment—agog over the news of HELEN's engagement—she bears down upon poor NICKY.*]

JULIA: Congratulations ! How do you do ? You heard Helen trying to put me off . . . she just whetted my curiosity ? Why were you so mysterious, Helen ? . . . Why didn't you tell me at lunch to-day ?

NICKY: We wanted to keep it a secret. . . .

JULIA: But, why ? Helen has no secrets from me ! And to think that, if I hadn't pushed my way in here to-night, you'd be off to Sweden and I would have missed you ! . . . And . . . Why Sweden ?

NICKY: Why not ?

HELEN (*quickly*): He travels a lot.

JULIA: Well, I'm going to ask you a lot of questions ! . . . When's the wedding ? Is it going to be soon ? Poor Philip has been dead long enough.

HELEN: It wasn't that . . . only . . . Nicky and I have known each other for such a short time.

JULIA: How long?

HELEN: We met about a month ago . . .

NICKY: In Paris.

JULIA (*happily*): Marvellous! Paris is the ideal place to fall in love in. . . . I always fall in love in Paris. . . . I do envy you. And you wanted to make sure that you love each other and that it wasn't just the springtime and Paris? Well, it's quite obvious to me you two must get married at once.

HELEN }
NICKY } (*Shaken*): Why?

JULIA: Because you're so suited to each other and you'll make each other happy.

HELEN: Oh, nonsense, Julia, you don't know anything at all about it.

JULIA: What about my two husbands?

HELEN: Oh, those!

JULIA: Anyhow, I know love when I see it

HELEN: Darling, you don't!

JULIA: I do. Love is a very beautiful thing. You remember Carlos?

HELEN: That wasn't love, that was lust.

JULIA: Then lust is a very beautiful thing! . . . Helen is a different person from what she was at lunch to-day . . . Look at her! . . . positively radiant with happiness. That's all due to you—er—Mr.—er—oh, I'm going to call you Nicky, may I, Helen? And he's got that starved, hungry look, a sure sign of love. I wouldn't hesitate to send an announcement to *The Times* to-morrow.

HELEN: It's not quite as simple as that, Julia.

JULIA: What's the snag, then? Has he got a wife already?

[HELEN *looks almost anxiously at him.*

NICKY (*indignantly*): Certainly not!

JULIA: Well, it *has* happened before!

HELEN: No . . . It's . . . you see . . . Nicholas has been abroad for years . . .

NICKY: In Africa. . . .

HELEN: He's come back . . . and, you see . . . (*lamely*) . . . well, he hasn't got a job.

JULIA (*cheerfully*): If he's only been in London for a few hours, he'll find one soon.

NICKY: I'd been here . . . looking for one for some time before I . . . before I met Helen.

JULIA (*brightly*): Well, then *we* must do something. Armand can help. He's always wanting efficient young men. You look efficient. Armand is my brother. . . . Armand Vaughan. . . . Awfully rich!

HELEN: You remember . . . I was telling you about him?

NICKY: Oh . . . er . . . yes.

JULIA: We can easily fix it . . . so that's arranged! You know, I had such a wretched evening. I knew something nice was going to happen . . . you two are it!

HELEN: Thank you. How did Charles come to tell you?

JULIA: Poor Charles! He came into the bar and started drinking like a fish. . . . But, like a fish! I saw his face and realised something was up. So I wormed it out of him. (*To NICKY*) Why didn't you call for Helen at Harriet's?

NICKY: I don't know Harriet.

JULIA: How lucky you are ! . . . Were you expecting him . . . going out with Charles like that ?

HELEN: I wasn't exactly expecting him . . . but I was very glad to see him.

JULIA: I shan't stay much longer . . . I just came to satisfy my curiosity and I've partially achieved my object.

NICKY (*alarmed*): Only partially ?

JULIA: Yes. You see, I take such an interest in Helen's life. . . . She's my best friend. . . . We were at school together. . . .

HELEN: We used to think of nothing but hockey and school-mistresses. . . .

JULIA: Then I knew her the *first* time she fell in love. (*To HELEN*) Gerald ! . . . Do you remember ? Then, when she was married. . . . So, you see, I want to know all the intimate details in this case . . . who introduced you . . . and things like that ! . . .

HELEN (*gaily*): We won't tell you, will we, Nicky ?

NICKY: No.

JULIA (*triumphantly*): You picked each other up ! That's much more fun ! I adore being picked up ! And I don't blame you, Helen. I don't blame you at all.

HELEN (*embarrassed*): My dear Julia . . . really ! Control yourself ! You mustn't say things like that. He's conceited enough already !

JULIA (*gushing*): He's charming. . . . You're very lucky. . . . Well, my dears, I hope you'll manage to be happy . . . but, don't ask me to keep it a secret because I'm going to tell everyone . . . (*with a fine sweeping gesture*) . . . Everyone !

HELEN: But we want it to be a secret. . . .

JULIA: That's so silly.

HELEN: It's idiotic, but we want it. (*Coaxing*)
Please, Julia. . . .

JULIA (*disappointed*): Oh . . . very well!!

HELEN: Promise. . . .

JULIA: I promise.

[*Knock at the front door.*]

HELEN and NICKY are startled. JULIA remains perfectly calm.

HELEN: I wonder what that can be?

JULIA (*calmly*): I expect it's Armand. . . . He's staying with me. . . . I left a message for him to come up as soon as he got in. . . . (*Confidentially to NICKY*) We'll arrange with him about your job.

NICKY (*alarmed*): Please . . . Please don't bother him.

[*He looks appealingly at HELEN who, at first, had seemed quite pleased with the idea.*]

HELEN (*firmly, with a reassuring look for NICKY*): No, Julia . . . Nicky is quite right. . . . Don't mention it to him to-night. . . .

[*The knocking continues.*]

(*To NICKY*): Nicky—the door!

[*NICKY goes to open the door.*]

JULIA (*gushing*): My dear . . . he's perfect.

HELEN (*resentful*): Why did you tell Armand to come up?

JULIA: I hate him to feel left out of things. . . .

[*Enter ARMAND followed by NICKY.*]

ARMAND is a rich and successful financier, but he looks and dresses as a poet—which is what he would prefer to be. He is dishevelled and untidy and, invariably—as now, irritated by JULIA.

ARMAND: Well, Helen . . . here I am. . . .

HELEN: Hello, Armand !

ARMAND: What is it ?

HELEN: What is what ?

ARMAND: What is it you want to see me about ?

[HELEN *looks puzzled*.

(To JULIA) Your note said she wanted to see me.

JULIA (*who is also invariably irritated by ARMAND*): It didn't . . . it said she had a surprise for you. . . .

ARMAND: Well ?

JULIA: She has. . . . Look ! (*She points to NICKY ; ARMAND looks at him vaguely.*) That's the surprise. They're engaged. . . .

ARMAND (*smiles*): I am glad, Helen. . . . But it's no surprise to me. . . .

HELEN: It is to everyone else. . . .

JULIA (*indignantly*): Don't be absurd, Armand. . . . Of course, it's a surprise. . . .

ARMAND: My dear . . . You told me yourself the other day that you wouldn't be surprised if Helen and Charles got engaged. . . .

JULIA: But this isn't Charles. . . . This is Nicky. . . . Look.

ARMAND (*looks*): Oh, yes. . . . He doesn't look like Charles. . . .

NICKY: Thank you.

JULIA: Well . . . he isn't Charles. . . . He's Nicky. . . . My God ! . . . this brother of mine . . . and he's very clever at business. . . . Don't gape, Armand . . . don't gape. . . . Congratulate him.

ARMAND (*shaking NICKY's hand*): I do. . . . This is nice. . . . Congratulations . . . er . . .

JULIA: Nicholas Wright. . . .

ARMAND: . . . Congratulations Wright !

NICKY: Thank you. . . .

JULIA: He wants to have a little talk with you. . . .

[HELEN and NICKY look aghast.

ARMAND: Really. . . . What about ?

JULIA: I thought he could help you in your business.

ARMAND (*resentful*): Really, Julia . . . I wish you'd mind your own affairs. She will interfere so. . . . She is constantly foisting useless young men on me. (*Politely*) But I would like to have a talk with you some time. . . . Are you a banker ?

NICKY: No. I'm er . . . I'm not.

ARMAND: You're lucky. . . . There are far too many of us.

JULIA: Not enough good ones.

ARMAND: What do you mean by that ?

JULIA: Don't be so touchy, Armand. I didn't mean anything.

ARMAND: Then don't say anything. . . .

JULIA: Oh, I'll be glad when your flat is ready and you can move back into it. . . . He's been staying with me for almost a week, and it's been harp, harp, harp . . . nag, nag, nag. . . . I pity your wife.

ARMAND: I haven't got a wife.

JULIA: I'm not surprised. (*Then, recovering herself*) What was I saying ? . . . Oh, yes. . . . What week-end can you both come down to the country ?

HELEN: We can't settle anything definite . . . because . . . you see . . .

NICKY (*firmly*): I have simply got to go to Sweden. . . .

JULIA: Yes . . . but you'll be back . . . people always do come back. . . .

ARMAND: Not necessarily.

JULIA (*patronisingly*): My dear . . . he said Sweden. . . . London is full of people who have just come back from Sweden . . . drinking *skol* and saying "Snap" at each other. . . .

HELEN: Well, we can't fix anything definite. . . .

JULIA (*fumbling in her bag*): Of course, we can. . . . Where's my little book?

ARMAND: Doesn't it occur to you that they may not want to come?

JULIA (*taken aback for a moment. Then indignant*): Really, Armand . . . What an idea! (*To HELEN and NICKY*) Armand doesn't mean to be rude . . . what he means is . . .

ARMAND (*interrupting*): What I mean is perfectly clear. There's no need to interpret everything I say as though it were a sort of Delphic Utterance . . . (*Fiercely*) Perhaps they don't want to come!

JULIA: I wish you hadn't come up here. You've done nothing but squabble and quibble. . . . I don't know what Nicky will think of us! Why did you come, anyway?

ARMAND: Because you left a note telling me to. . . .

JULIA: Are you going to stay until I leave a note telling you to go?

ARMAND: No. I'm ready when you are. . . .

HELEN (*attempting to calm them*): Have a drink, Armand?

ARMAND: No, thank you. . . . (*He looks on the mantelpiece.*) Where's the little clock I gave you, Helen?

HELEN (*vaguely*): I . . . sent it to be . . . Er, its little hand dropped off.

[NICKY *feels his pocket guiltily.*

ARMAND (*impatiently*): Come along, Julia. . . . They're longing to get rid of us. . . .

JULIA: Are you, Helen?

HELEN: Well . . . as a matter of fact . . .

NICKY: Yes, we——

ARMAND (*delighted. Triumphantly to JULIA*): There . . . you see! I like an honest man! . . . We'll let ourselves out. . . . (*Shaking hands with NICKY*) Good night, Wright. Give me a ring one day and we'll have that talk. . . . Come on, Julia!

[*He goes.*

JULIA: Well, good night, Nicky. . . . I do congratulate you! (*To HELEN*) Good night, my dear! I approve! . . . I think he's . . . (*She whispers to HELEN.*)

HELEN: Good night, darling! . . .

JULIA: Thanks awfully for asking me up! . . .

[JULIA *goes.*

HELEN: Whew! Well . . . that's over! . . . (*HELEN and NICKY sigh with relief.*)

[JULIA *re-appears.*

JULIA: Where's my little book?

HELEN: Where did you leave your little book?

JULIA: It's there on the sofa. . . . It's just a ruse! I left it there on purpose! . . . I really came back to explain about Armand. . . . He doesn't mean it, really! He likes you. . . . I can see he

likes you. We'll have a concerted go at him to-morrow. . . .

ARMAND (*off*): Julia ! . . .

JULIA: There, I must go. . . . Not a moment's peace ! Well, good night ! . . . Thank you . . .

ARMAND (*off*): Julia ! !

JULIA: There you see ! . . . I'm coming ! . . . He doesn't mean it, really !

[JULIA goes.]

HELEN: Thank God ! That's over ! What an evening ! By lunch-time our engagement will be common gossip—whatever that may mean !

NICKY: But she promised not to tell anyone !

HELEN (*lightly*): Julia's promises ! I think we put on a very good show !

NICKY (*depressed*): It's all so easy !

HELEN (*gaily*): Thank you very much.

NICKY: I didn't mean that. . . . I meant getting a job . . . making a living. If you have rich friends, you have a rich job. If you have poor friends, you have a poor job. If you have no friends . . . you do without a job. It's so simple, really . . . like a system.

HELEN (*kindly*): Why don't you prove the system ?

NICKY: I do.

HELEN: Why don't you take advantage of your rich friends ? Armand really would get you something.

NICKY (*bitterly*): Not if he knew I was a . . .

HELEN (*sharply*): You're not. You've never stolen anything. You're not that sort of man.

NICKY (*pleased*): You seem to know me very well.

HELEN (*as a joke*): I've been engaged to you for fifteen minutes. Anyhow, I know that you are

brave and decent and . . . it sounds silly—a gentleman.

NICKY: Which isn't necessarily a compliment. You know, I'm afraid that you're the sort of woman who thinks the best of everyone . . . whether they deserve it or not. . . .

HELEN: Nonsense . . . look at the way I spoke to Charles . . . look at the way I spoke to you. . . .

NICKY (*sincerely*): I'm looking at the way you spoke . . . at the way you're speaking to me. . . .

HELEN: It's been fun. I've enjoyed it. Don't you think we are rather foolish suddenly to stop?

NICKY: Do you really think that What's-his-name would give me a job?

HELEN: Armand? I'm sure of it. Especially if we were engaged.

NICKY: If we were engaged. . . .

HELEN: Why shouldn't we be? What harm would it do? . . . You'd get your job! . . .

NICKY: I see what I'd get . . . what I don't see is what you'd get out of it. . . .

HELEN: I'd get protection from Charles . . . and a lot of fun. It is fun, you know . . . isn't it?

NICKY: Yes . . . but . . .

HELEN: When we get bored, we can break off our engagement . . . we can end it. . . .

NICKY: I see how we can end it. . . . What I don't see is how we can begin it.

HELEN: It has already begun with a swing!

NICKY (*smiling*): Obtaining by false pretences . . . that's what it is! (*Seriously*) No . . . it's impossible!

HELEN: Why?

NICKY: For one thing, these . . . (*he indicates his clothes*) are all I possess in the world.

HELEN: I can lend you money to buy clothes with. . . . You can always pay me back.

NICKY: Always?

HELEN: You'll do it, then?

NICKY: Aren't we looking too much on the bright side? I can see lots of difficulties.

HELEN: Ignore them! Rise above them!

NICKY (*smiling*): Very well!

HELEN (*pleased*): Good. I think I'll continue to call you "Nicky" even though your name is David . . . less confusing to Julia and Charles and particularly to Armand.

NICKY: All right!

HELEN: We'll buy your clothes and things to-morrow. . . . Then we'll launch you through Julia, I think.

NICKY: You're awfully kind.

HELEN: Oh, my dear . . . I'm enjoying it immensely!

NICKY: Helen . . . if you want to, don't hesitate to turn me out. I shan't mind. I'm used to it.

HELEN: Why should I want to turn you out?

NICKY: When you think it over, you may regret it.

HELEN: I have thought it over. You look tired. Will you come around to-morrow . . . soon after ten?

NICKY: Thank you.

HELEN: Where are you sleeping to-night, by the way?

NICKY: I am sharing a place with some friends of mine.

HELEN: Where?

NICKY (*he smiles*): Near the Embankment.

HELEN: You mean . . . ?

NICKY: It's clean and quite warm.

HELEN (*she hesitates, then*): You'd better sleep here.

NICKY: My dear Helen . . . we're only engaged !

HELEN: This sofa is very comfortable. It doesn't look like it, but it lets down. I'll get you some sheets and things. . . .

[*Exit HELEN.*]

NICKY *walks around the room humming happily to himself. He puts his hands in his pockets and immediately stops humming. He takes out the things he had taken at the beginning of the Act and puts them back in their original positions.*

HELEN *re-enters with sheets and blankets.*

HELEN: Here we are ! I'll make it up ! (*She starts to make up a bed.*)

NICKY: No, no . . . I'll do that. . . .

HELEN: Very well. . . . Breakfast at 9.30. Or is that too early ?

[*NICKY shakes his head.*]

I'll have them call you in time for a bath.

NICKY (*ecstatically*): A bath and breakfast !

[*HELEN goes towards the door. NICKY notices the jewels which are still on the table. He hands them to her.*]

HELEN: Well, good night !

NICKY: Good night ! Don't forget these ! (*Giving them.*)

HELEN (*carelessly*): Oh, thanks. . . . Are you all right, then ?

NICKY: Yes, thank you.

HELEN (*at door*): Sleep well . . . My sweet ! . . .

[*Exit HELEN.*

NICKY *stands looking at the door for a moment.*

He takes off his coat.

HELEN *re-appears.*

HELEN: Nicky ! It's the little door on the left !

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

Three months later. About 5 p.m.

The scene is the living-room of JULIA's house in Surrey. It is decorated and furnished in modern style and is dominated by a rather vexing modern painting which hangs above the fireplace. The furniture is simple and looks comfortable with the exception of one rather ominous looking chair, which is made entirely of iron, and is a trap for the unwary. A long table—hospitably crowded with drinks—stands against the wall. An archway leads to the hall and French windows are open on to a terrace.

When the curtain rises, JULIA is looking uncertainly at the painting.

BRISTOW—a young and efficient looking butler—*enters with a plate of sandwiches which he places on the drink table.*

JULIA: Bristow . . . what do you think of that picture?

BRISTOW: Well, it's not my place to say, madam.

JULIA: Perhaps you're right. . . . 'There is something about it. . . . I mean, you can't help noticing it, can you?

BRISTOW: No, madam.

JULIA: It makes you stop and think . . . at least, it makes you stop. . . . Have you heard the result of the 4.30 yet, Bristow?

BRISTOW: Not yet, madam . . . but I believe Verdigris will win.

JULIA: Have you backed it?

BRISTOW: Yes, madam. . . .

JULIA: What a pity, Bristow. . . . I meant to tell you . . . Albatross, of course. . . .

BRISTOW: I don't think it's got a chance, madam.

JULIA: I beg your pardon, Bristow, I've backed it. Everyone tells me it's bound to win.

BRISTOW: I beg your pardon, madam, but who told you that?

JULIA: Everyone, everyone, Bristow. It's a certainty.

BRISTOW: I'm always doubtful of certainties, madam. . . .

JULIA: You did tell Mr. Vaughan?

BRISTOW: Yes, madam.

JULIA: What did he say? . . .

BRISTOW (*embarrassed*): He said——

JULIA: Well, what did he say? Go on: tell me.

BRISTOW: "I'm damned if I will!"

JULIA (*taken aback*): Oh!

BRISTOW (*explaining*): I gave him your message, madam, and that is what he said.

JULIA: That'll be all, thank you, Bristow. . . .

[BRISTOW goes.

JULIA goes out on the terrace and calls upstairs.

Charles!

CHARLES (*off*): Hullo!

JULIA: Are you nearly ready?

CHARLES (*off*): Sort of.

JULIA: Don't be too long! We're leaving in a quarter of an hour.

CHARLES (*off*): Right-ho! Be down in a minute. . . .

[Enter ARMAND from the hall. He has some papers—a poem on which he is working—in his hand. He is untidy as usual.

ARMAND (*peevishly*): What's this, Julia? Bristow tells me we're leaving. Where are we going?

JULIA: You do look a mess. We're going to Margot Duflos' for cocktails. She has what's-his-name staying with her.

ARMAND: Who?

JULIA: You know . . . the famous . . . what is his name? Anyway, I want to meet him.

ARMAND: Do you mind if I don't come? I'm rather busy.

JULIA: But, Armand, this is a holiday!

ARMAND (*grimly*): Exactly. (*He sits down and begins to work away at the papers which he brought in with him.*)

JULIA: You must come . . . you'll enjoy it when you get there.

ARMAND: I doubt that. . . . What rhymes with willow?

JULIA: Oh, pillow!

ARMAND: Pillow? No, no. . . . Where are Helen and Nicky?

JULIA: Playing cricket.

ARMAND: Of course!

JULIA: Anyhow, we won't wait for them. If they're not back, we'll go without them . . . you and Charles and me . . .

ARMAND: Do you mean that you'll let them off and insist on my going—just because I'm your brother?

JULIA: Oh, Armand . . .

ARMAND: And while we're on the subject of Charles—

JULIA: We're not on the subject.

ARMAND: I *am*. I wish you hadn't asked him

down here. He gets on my nerves . . . moping about.

JULIA: Charles is my guest !

ARMAND: Oh, he may be a guest to you, but he's a pest to Helen. (*Grudgingly*) He's all right, but can't he *see* that Helen——

[*Enter CHARLES up R.*

JULIA: Ssh ! . . . Charles, you do look nice !

CHARLES: You're looking very nice yourself !

JULIA: Thank you. Help yourself to a drink if you want it.

CHARLES: What about you ?

JULIA: No, thanks. I know Margot's cocktails. (*Offering him a plate of sandwiches.*) Sandwich ? . . .

CHARLES: No, thanks. . . .

JULIA (*offering sandwiches to ARMAND*): Have some blotting paper, Armand ?

[*ARMAND takes one automatically, and, not knowing what to do with it, puts it on the sofa beside him.*

CHARLES: How's the poetry going, Armand ?

ARMAND (*coldly*): Thank you.

CHARLES: You know, I don't know whether it's funnier to think of you as a poet or a banker.

ARMAND: I don't see that either is particularly funny.

CHARLES: Well . . . you don't look like a banker and you don't talk like a poet.

JULIA: He's not going to give himself away like that !

CHARLES: Are Helen and Nicky coming with us ?

JULIA: If they're back in time, but we won't wait for them.

CHARLES (*confidentially*): Have you heard when they're going to get married ?

JULIA: No, I haven't. But I'll find out. . . . Perhaps they never will get married—they never quarrel.

CHARLES: Why should they?

JULIA: I always do when I'm in love.

ARMAND: You must be constantly in love, then. . . . (JULIA *turns away indignantly*.) Pay no attention to her, Charles. Julia's never been in love, have you?

JULIA: Let's not discuss it. (*Then, meaningly to CHARLES*) People in love do like to be left alone!

CHARLES: Do they?

JULIA: Er—Charles, can we use your car this afternoon?

CHARLES: Of course! My dear, I'd love to drive you. I'll bring it round. . . .

[CHARLES *goes out*.]

JULIA (*meditatively*): . . . He's rather sweet. . . . See? . . . I think you're right about Charles.

ARMAND: What?

JULIA: Perhaps he does pester Helen rather a lot. I think I'll talk to him.

ARMAND: You've given him a pretty broad hint.

JULIA: Yes—but that's not enough for Charles. I'll have a little talk with him.

ARMAND: Be careful, Julia! You know you're apt to get a bit above yourself.

JULIA: Oh, yes, I know. I'm very fond of Charles. I know his infatuation for Helen is nothing but a habit . . . a bad habit . . . and I want to break him of it. . . . (*She pauses and looks at ARMAND. Coming to a decision*) And talking about bad habits . . . I've had another letter from the Bank.

ARMAND: Let's see it.

JULIA: I tore it up. It was terribly rude. . . . As far as I can remember, it said that my account wasn't satisfactory from their point of view!

ARMAND: Well, it isn't.

JULIA: They said that if I issued any more cheques, they would be forced to return them marked "R.D. represent" or some such nonsense. . . .

ARMAND: Well, then, you mustn't issue any more cheques.

JULIA: But I have! (*Plaintively*) What shall I do?

ARMAND (*sighs*): I'll telephone them. But I should have thought that anyone with as much money as you have could manage to keep some of it in the bank.

JULIA (*scornfully*): As much money as I have!

ARMAND: You're quite a rich woman.

JULIA (*indignantly*): A rich woman! . . . I'm a pauper. I have no money . . . what I don't lose at the club or racing I spend. . . .

ARMAND: Well then, don't go to the club. And, anyway, it's absurd to play baccarat in the heart of Surrey.

JULIA: It's no more absurd than anywhere else: besides, I doubt if Surrey has a heart!

ARMAND: This is the last time I'll help you out.

JULIA: That's what you always say.

ARMAND: This time I mean it.

[*Enter NICKY. His whole appearance has changed since last we saw him. He looks prosperous and happy, and his voice has lost its bitter note. He wears white flannels and has come straight in from the cricket field.*]

NICKY: Hello, you two ! (*He senses their strained relations.*) Why, what's the matter ?

JULIA: Armand has been forbidding me to gamble, that's all.

ARMAND: On the contrary, I've just undertaken to pay off your overdraft . . . and I notice that you've omitted to thank me.

JULIA: I haven't reached the point when I'm reduced to thanking people for abusing me. (*She smiles sweetly at NICKY.*) Who won ?

NICKY: I'm afraid the locals did. We were rather out of form.

ARMAND: Did you make many runs ?

NICKY (*casually*): One or two.

JULIA: How many . . . really ?

NICKY: Three. May I ? (*He pours out a lemonade for himself.*)

JULIA: Oh ! What have you done to Helen ?

NICKY: Nothing. She's gone upstairs to tidy.

JULIA: We should be leaving in a few minutes. . . . By the way, Armand, you'd better go and get ready.

ARMAND: I'm ready now.

JULIA: No, you're not, dear. You must brush your hair, and that coat's out of the question.

ARMAND: But, Julia . . .

JULIA: Armand !

ARMAND (*resigned*): Oh, all right ! . . .

[ARMAND goes out.]

NICKY: Oh, I'm so tired ! (*He flops on to a chair. It is modern, and not very comfortable.*)

JULIA: You look it !

NICKY: Wait till you see Helen. (*He is trying to get comfortable in the chair.*) You know the joke

about modern furniture? It looks uncomfortable and, by God, it is!

JULIA: Those chairs were made to fit the body.

NICKY: Whose body? (*He moves to the sofa and is more at ease.*) This is better . . . it was hot playing this afternoon, too hot, really!

JULIA: Does that mean you don't want to come with us?

NICKY: Would you mind?

JULIA: Of course not! You and Helen can stay quietly at home like an old married couple. By the way, when are you going to get married?

NICKY: I don't know. Why do you ask?

JULIA: I want to know. You've been engaged for almost six months.

NICKY: Barely three. . . .

JULIA: Three months, then. Surely that's a long time?

NICKY: It is. Quite a long time.

JULIA: Well?

NICKY: The whole thing is very complicated, Julia.

JULIA: What do you mean . . . complicated?

NICKY: Well, you see . . . When I first met Helen, I couldn't marry her. . . .

JULIA: Because you hadn't got a job. . . .

NICKY: Not only that. . . . Perhaps we should have told you . . . about me. (*Making a good story of it*) Well . . . legally, I do not exist. I have no nationality.

JULIA (*mystified*): What do you mean?

NICKY: You see . . . when I was secretary to the Bulgarian Light, Heat, and Power Company, I had to become a Bulgarian. You know, for political reasons. . . .

JULIA (*intrigued*): But I didn't know that you were ever in Bulgaria. I thought it was South Africa. . . .

NICKY: Ah . . . that was later. I fled to South Africa after the *débâcle* and *coup d'état* in Bulgaria.

JULIA: The *débâcle* and *coup d'état* . . .

NICKY: But, legally, I was still a Bulgarian. At least, I was until the new Government repudiated my nationality. Then . . . as I had ceased to be British . . . there I was . . . a man without a country !

JULIA: But, Nicky, how awful !

NICKY: Yes, it is, isn't it ?

JULIA: Can't you do anything about it ?

NICKY: I'm doing all I can, of course. I'm in touch now with the Home Office. . . . I hope it's going to be all right.

JULIA: I hope so, too . . . Poor Nicky !

[*Enter HELEN. She still looks a little bit tired.*]

HELEN: Did you hear that this (*pointing to NICKY*) insisted on walking home for exercise ?

JULIA: I should have thought he'd have had enough playing cricket.

HELEN: If you can call one run exercise.

JULIA: He said three.

HELEN: Oh, Nicky, I don't believe you ever played for West Africa.

NICKY: I did lots of times.

HELEN: Where ?

NICKY: Up and down the coast.

HELEN: Who did you play against ?

NICKY (*shamefacedly*): Zulus, mostly.

HELEN (*triumphantly*): I thought so !

JULIA: Talking of Zulus, Nicky's been telling me about himself . . . about why you don't get married.

HELEN (*taken aback*): Oh, have you, Nicky?

NICKY (*quickly*): Yes, dear, you know! About my being a Bulgarian!

HELEN: Oh, yes! Of course! Didn't you *know*, Julia? . . . Poor Nicky's a Bulgarian!

JULIA: Does anyone know?

NICKY: No one . . . except Helen, you and me . . . and the Home Office, of course.

JULIA: Of course.

HELEN (*explaining*): You know how funny people are about Bulgarians.

JULIA: Yes, yes. Well, I shan't tell a soul!

HELEN: Thank you, darling! . . . Please don't, because it's awfully important for Nicky.

[*Enter JENNY. She is a young and pretty parlour-maid.*]

JENNY: Excuse me, madam, but Cook says do you want it on the branch or purée?

JULIA: Well, I don't think we can have it on the branch . . . but I'd better see Cook, and see what she thinks.

[*JULIA and JENNY go out.*]

NICKY: It would have been awful to have had it on the branch!

HELEN (*scornfully*): So you're a Bulgarian!

NICKY (*pleased with himself*): I thought it rather a good story.

HELEN: But why, Nicky? What made you tell it?

NICKY: Julia did. She got curious about when we were to be married. I had to tell her something.

HELEN: Have you ever been to Bulgaria?

NICKY: No.

HELEN: Can you speak Bulgarian?

NICKY: Of course not.

HELEN: Then you must learn. Quickly! Julia will probably have someone to dinner to-night who can't speak anything else.

NICKY: I'll say I was pulling her leg.

HELEN: One doesn't pull Julia's leg. She always tells the truth herself . . . however painful it may be . . . and expects to be told it in return.

NICKY: She's going to get more than she bargained for.

HELEN (*shrugs*): It's your story . . . I hope you can stick to it. (*Noticing his drink*) Where did you get that?

NICKY: Want one?

HELEN: Please.

[NICKY *pours a drink for her.*

Enter ARMAND, dressed for the party.

Hello . . . you do look dressed up!

ARMAND (*grimly*): I am. May I borrow Nicky for a moment, Helen?

HELEN: If you return him intact!

ARMAND: It's about this crisis. . . . If the Government is forced out—and I've never known a French Government that wasn't—I want you to telephone Paris. . . . You'd better come with me and I'll tell you exactly. . . . I've got to go to this footling party with Julia . . .

NICKY: All right.

HELEN: How's my young man making out, Armand? Does he show any ability?

ARMAND: I should say he does. If he's not very careful, he'll be a director.

HELEN: Director?

NICKY: Yaha! . . . a director!

HELEN: Is that a good thing?

NICKY: Um! . . . It's less work than an office boy, but it's better paid.

ARMAND: Didn't he tell you what he did the other day? . . . about the Hayshot Mortgage?

HELEN: No, he didn't. He's so modest. You tell me.

ARMAND: Well . . . he . . . Oh, no, you wouldn't understand. . . .

HELEN: Why not? I'll try. Tell me, anyhow. . . .

ARMAND (*embarrassed*): Well, I don't really understand myself. . . . But the rest of the Board do . . . and they think it's a good thing. I *was* pleased. . . . Coming, Nicky?

HELEN: Will he be paid extra for this?

ARMAND: Wait and see. . . . Coming, Nicky?

[ARMAND and NICKY go out. HELEN stretches out on the sofa. After a moment CHARLES enters from the terrace. He coughs to attract HELEN's attention.]

HELEN: Hello, Charles. The others are getting ready.

CHARLES: Where's Nicky?

HELEN: He's with Armand. We're not coming.

CHARLES (*imploring*): Helen!

HELEN: What is it, Charles?

CHARLES: Don't you know?

HELEN (*sighs*): Oh, that!

CHARLES: Isn't there a chance, Helen?

HELEN (*sharply*): I suppose I ought to be

touched by your devotion, Charles. But I find it rather ridiculous. Devotion to a lost cause is, you know.

CHARLES: But, Helen . . .

HELEN: Oh, my dear, why can't you be sensible about it?

CHARLES: I'm trying to.

HELEN: No, you're not. The attitude you adopt is so irritating . . . so irritating and gutless. . . .

CHARLES: But, Helen, I love you.

HELEN (*irritated*): If you did, you'd leave me alone. (*Then, more calmly*) Besides, I'm engaged to Nicky. . . . Oh, my dear, I'm sorry. But I'm not in love with you. I never could be. I treat you abominably. Don't you realise that?

CHARLES: Yes, I do, but it makes no difference.

HELEN: Make it make some difference. . . . Do something about it. . . . Travel! Go round the world! . . .

[*Enter JULIA. She stands quietly in the doorway, unnoticed by HELEN and CHARLES.*]

CHARLES: I've been round the world.

HELEN: Then drink!

CHARLES: I do drink!

HELEN: Drink more, then! Drink and be merry. Try to forget all about me, and we'll both be happier.

CHARLES: Oh, lord!

JULIA (*coming into the room*): Are you ready, Charles?

CHARLES: Yes, I suppose so.

[*CHARLES goes. HELEN picks up a tennis ball and begins to play with it.*]

JULIA: Oh, Helen (*she hesitates*), are you playing with that?

HELEN (*with some of her irritation left over from CHARLES*): No, Julia.

JULIA: Good ! I want to talk to you.

HELEN: What do you want to talk to me about ?

JULIA: About Charles.

[HELEN *puts the ball down*.

HELEN: Well . . . what about Charles ?

JULIA: He's going to pieces.

HELEN: He's such a fool.

JULIA: It's not altogether his fault.

HELEN (*disinterested*): I suppose not.

JULIA (*vehemently*): I'm sick of charming people who make hell of other people's lives.

HELEN (*surprised at her tone*): Do you mean me, Julia ?

JULIA: I do.

HELEN: I've never made a hell of anybody's life.

JULIA: What about Charles ?

HELEN: Well . . . what about him ?

JULIA: He only started his serious drinking when you and Nicky became engaged.

HELEN: You can't blame me for that. It's not my fault.

JULIA: He's in love with you.

HELEN: I've done everything to stop it.

JULIA: To stop him drinking ?

HELEN (*impatiently*): To stop him being in love with me. And, I must say, it wasn't very tactful of you to invite him down with us this week-end.

JULIA: You told me you hadn't seen him for ages. I did it on purpose. I thought it was a good idea.

HELEN: I've been avoiding him for months.

JULIA: That's not being very kind to him.

HELEN: I'm as kind as I dare be. Lord knows I don't want to encourage him.

JULIA: But, Helen——

HELEN (*very, very angry*): I am not a nursemaid, Julia, nor a philanthropic institution. . . . I don't feel that I am under any obligation to look after Charles. . . . If I find him—naked and hiccuping—in the gutter, I'll do something about him. Apart from that, he must look after himself. . . . I can't see why you should worry yourself to death about him!

JULIA: I'm fond of Charles.

HELEN: So am I . . . But . . . Good Lord!

JULIA: I'm sorry for him.

HELEN: He's sorry enough for himself.

JULIA: Couldn't you . . . ?

HELEN: Couldn't I what?

JULIA: Ask him to try and pull himself together?

HELEN: Do you think he would? . . . Just because I asked him to? . . . Without promising to marry him or something? Of course, he wouldn't. . . . You can't change people, Julia.

JULIA: I think you can. After all, it's not as though he were a confirmed drunkard or a criminal.

[HELEN starts at the word "criminal." She gives an involuntary glance in the direction that NICKY went.]

HELEN (*sharply*): What do you mean by that?

JULIA: You can't cure dipsomaniacs.

HELEN: Yes . . . but criminals?

JULIA: You can't reform them.

HELEN: Why not?

JULIA: You can't.

HELEN: Why do you suddenly bring criminals into the conversation?

JULIA (*confused*): I don't know . . . I didn't do it very suddenly . . . why did I?

HELEN: You deliberately said that criminals can't be reformed. Now, why?

JULIA: Well, they can't be reformed. You ask anyone!

HELEN (*after a pause, shamefacedly*): I'll speak to Charles about his drinking, if you think it'll do any good.

JULIA: Thank you. You're sure you and Nicky won't come?

HELEN: Quite sure, thank you, darling.

[JULIA moves towards the door.

JULIA: Oh, do you like spinach?

HELEN: No, dear.

JULIA: We're having it for dinner. Armand loathes it.

HELEN: So do I.

JULIA: It's from the garden. (*Hopefully*) It's quite fresh. . . .

HELEN: Yes, dear, but I loathe it just the same.

JULIA: I'm afraid we'll have to have it. Cook suggested it. She'll leave if we don't have it. . . . She's only been here a week. . . . I can't thwart her. . . .

[Enter NICKY.

Oh, Nicky! . . . Have you finished with Armand?

NICKY: Yes, if this crisis develops, I may have to go up to town.

JULIA: When?

NICKY: To-night. You can do a lot on a Saturday morning.

HELEN: Let's hope it doesn't develop, then.

JULIA: Isn't there anyone there who can do your job?

NICKY: Several. . . . That's why I may have to go . . . to prevent them from finding it out.

JULIA: Nicky . . . just between the three of us . . . what do you *do* at the office?

NICKY: I work there.

JULIA: Yes . . . but how?

NICKY: Oh, I sit at an enormous desk completely covered with papers which I sign. That's all!

JULIA: It sounds so easy!

NICKY (*confidentially*): As a matter of fact, it is!

HELEN: What does Armand do?

NICKY: Ah!

HELEN: Don't "ah!"—What does he do?

[JULIA makes a noise of disgust. She points to a diamond bracelet which she is wearing and which has become unfastened.]

JULIA: . . . Look! . . . Will you fix this, Helen? I can't manage.

HELEN: How very grand of you, Julia, to wear all your diamonds.

JULIA: I always do. They bring me luck, and the Lord knows I need it. . . . Have you backed anything in the big race to-day, Nicky?

NICKY: No.

JULIA: I have: Albatross. I've put my shirt on it.

HELEN (*fiddling with the clasp of the bracelet*): It seems to be broken.

JULIA: Blast! That's the worst of expensive things . . . they're always coming to pieces.

[Enter BRISTOW up R.C.]

BRISTOW: Excuse me, madam, but Mr. Vaughan and Captain Trent are waiting in the car.

JULIA (*in a flutter*): And about time, too! I'll go right out . . . Helen, put it away . . . I haven't time.

HELEN: Where shall I put it?

JULIA: In the middle drawer of that thing in my room . . . among my undies. . . . Bristow, any further news?

BRISTOW: Yes, madam, Verdigris won. The favourite, madam.

JULIA: Oh—and Albatross?

BRISTOW: Wasn't placed, madam.

JULIA: Oh!

NICKY: You've lost your shirt, Julia!

JULIA: Yes; pity, isn't it? (*Magnanimously*) I'm so glad you won, Bristow. . . . Well, good-bye! . . .

HELEN: Good-bye, darling, have a good time!

NICKY: Good-bye, Julia!

[JULIA goes out.]

BRISTOW: Can I get you anything, madam?

HELEN: No, thank you, Bristow. We're all right.

BRISTOW: Very good, madam.

NICKY: Oh, Bristow! If a call comes through for Mr. Vaughan, I'll take it.

BRISTOW: Very good, sir.

[BRISTOW goes.]

HELEN takes the plate of sandwiches from the table and settles down with them on the sofa.

HELEN: I'm so hungry. . . . Any sort of scene gives me an empty feeling here and makes me ravenous. . . . You know what it was on the branch, don't you?

NICKY: No.

HELEN: Spinach!

NICKY: Oh, God! Who have you been having a scene with? . . . Charles?

HELEN (*nods. Her mouth is full*): . . . And Julia.

NICKY: Why?

HELEN: She said you can't reform criminals.

NICKY: Well?

HELEN: Well, I've reformed you . . . made an honest banker of you.

NICKY: I wish you wouldn't look on me as a criminal.

HELEN: I don't at the present . . . but, after all, you were when I met you!

NICKY (*coldly*): Quite. And Charles?

HELEN: Charles is an idiot!

NICKY: I feel sorry for him.

HELEN: So does Julia. Why?

NICKY: This . . . er . . . arrangement of ours isn't exactly fair to him.

HELEN: Why ever not?

NICKY: It puts him in a false position. To anyone with as little imagination as Charles—to be in love with an engaged woman is worse than being in love with a married one. It's mortal sin! He feels that he's a cad and it makes him unhappy.

HELEN (*vehemently*): Oh . . . how that annoys me!

NICKY: What?

HELEN: What you just said.

NICKY (*lightly*): Oh . . . that!

HELEN: Yes . . . your pretending to be sorry for Charles! You'd think he was a baby in arms the way you all go on!

NICKY: I have a distinctly guilty feeling here . . . (*he puts his hand on his heart*) about him.

HELEN: Well . . . what do you propose to do about it?

NICKY: Tell him the truth.

HELEN (*surprised*): Really, Nicky. . . . What good would that do?

NICKY: It might not do any good. But I would like to tell him. I'd like to tell everyone.

HELEN (*quietly, hurt*): Why? Is the situation so . . . irksome to you?

NICKY: It is a bit.

HELEN: Well, then, we can break our engagement. . . . We can easily think of some reason . . . by the way, what is your reason?

NICKY (*hesitating*): Oh . . .

HELEN (*sharply*): Have you fallen in love?

NICKY: As a matter of fact, I have.

HELEN (*crestfallen*): Oh! I hope you'll be happy. (*She attacks the sandwiches viciously.*)

NICKY: Thanks! Don't you want to know who it is?

HELEN: Who is it?

NICKY: You, Helen. . . .

[HELEN stops in the middle of a bite and looks at him.

. . . I couldn't go on fooling everyone without fooling myself, you know.

HELEN: Is that your only reason?

NICKY: It's one of them. There are about fifty others.

HELEN: I think I'd prefer some of the others.

NICKY: Have your choice! I love you for every reason that any man has ever loved any woman . . . because you're beautiful . . . because you're kind . . .

HELEN: I'm not beautiful . . .

NICKY (*quickly*): Because you're modest . . .

HELEN (*happily*): I'm not . . . I'm vain and rather foolish. . . .

NICKY: Not to me you aren't!

HELEN: Nicky! Are you proposing to me?

NICKY: Lord, no! I'm just . . .

HELEN (*interrupting*): Well, then . . . I wish you would.

NICKY: Do you mean . . . ?

[HELEN *nods*. He *grins*.

What a relief!

HELEN (*laughs*): Were you expecting me to say "No"?

NICKY: No.

HELEN (*shocked*): Nicky!

NICKY: I thought you might at first, of course . . . to make it more difficult.

HELEN (*ruefully*): I must say . . .

NICKY (*gaily*): What must you say, my darling?

HELEN: This is a pretty rotten proposal.

NICKY: What did you expect? . . . Moonlight and soft music?

HELEN: Why not? (*She sighs*.) At least, I'd have liked a little less confidence from you. A few pretty speeches would hardly have been amiss.

NICKY: I started off with some.

HELEN: You didn't mean them.

NICKY: Didn't I though !!

HELEN: You were trying to coax me and to flatter me. . . . When you saw I didn't need any coaxing, you stopped. You didn't mean them !

NICKY: I did. I stopped because they all sounded completely inadequate.

HELEN: Nicky !

[They kiss. HELEN walks away from him and laughs softly and happily to herself.]

NICKY: What is it ? What are you laughing at ?

HELEN (*gaily*): Us . . . You and me . . . this room . . . this moment . . . waiting for us all our lives, though we didn't know it. Enjoy it while we can, Nicky !

NICKY: There'll be other rooms . . . other moments . . .

HELEN: There will, indeed . . . but none quite like this, Nicky. . . . Unclouded happiness is very rare. Do you know that this is the happiest moment of our lives ?

NICKY: But, darling . . . we have only just begun. . . .

HELEN: That's why. The beginning of love is the best part of it.

NICKY (*mocking*): The rest is absolute hell, I suppose.

HELEN: It can be.

NICKY: Helen . . . I won't have you being cynical about love. It isn't decent !

HELEN: I wasn't being cynical. I was being frank and honest.

NICKY (*scornfully*): Frank and honest ! To please

me, dear, stop trying to talk like a woman of the world.

HELEN: But I am a woman of the world. . . . I have been for years.

NICKY: You're not any longer.

HELEN: What sort of a woman am I, then?

NICKY: You're the sort of woman . . . (*He hesitates.*) You'd like me to say something charming, but I can't think of anything. . . . You're the sort of woman . . .

HELEN: It doesn't matter.

NICKY: Oh, but it does. . . . (*He thinks.*) You are the sort of woman . . . (*He hesitates again.*)

HELEN: Think of it later. . . .

NICKY: No, no . . . I'll think of it now. . . . (*He concentrates.*)

HELEN (*impatiently*): This is absurd.

NICKY (*grinning at her*): Anyhow, Helen, I love you . . . with or without moonlight!

HELEN (*relieved*): That's better.

[*She is sitting on the sofa. She touches the tip of his nose.*]

That's what I first liked about you.

NICKY: My nose!

HELEN: . . . And the way you talk through it!

NICKY: Darling . . . I'm awfully sorry. . . .

HELEN: It doesn't matter . . . you could talk through a hole in the back of your neck, and I'd still hang on your words.

[*NICKY's gaze wanders around the room. HELEN does not take her eyes off him.*]

(*Pouting*) Darling, I don't like it.

NICKY: What?

HELEN: You can take your eyes off me and I *can't* take my eyes off you. . . .

NICKY (*smiling*): We are in love . . . aren't we ?

HELEN (*almost sadly*): Yes. . . . Of course it won't last. I don't suppose that I shall ever actually hate you . . . but I shall *never* love you as much as I do at this moment.

NICKY: What a pessimist you are ! Are you always going to talk like that ?

HELEN: It doesn't matter if I do. . . . I don't mean a word of it. Starting from now, I expect that I shall love you a little more each day until, when I'm an old woman of eighty, I shall be absolutely vibrant with passion.

NICKY: What an indecent spectacle that is going to be ! They'll put you in a museum !

HELEN (*ruefully*): They'll put me in an asylum.

[*Enter BRISTOW. He has to cough to attract their attention.*]

What do you want, Bristow ?

BRISTOW: The telephone call for Mr. Vaughan, madam. I have put it through to the library.

NICKY: The library ? I never knew there was a library.

HELEN: Yes, dear . . . the *little* room . . . where Julia keeps her Penguin series. . . .

NICKY: Oh ! . . . Thank you, Bristow.

[*NICKY bows to HELEN with old-world courtesy. (Formally)* May I call on you again, Mrs. Winton ?

HELEN: Whenever you happen to be passing . . . Mr. Wright.

NICKY: It's been such fun ! . . .

[*Exit NICKY. HELEN watches him till he is well out of the room. She turns to BRISTOW with a dazzling smile.*]

HELEN (*sighs. Ecstatically, in a completely unsuitable tone of voice*): Oh ! . . . Bristow. . . .

BRISTOW: Yes, madam ?

[HELEN *laughs and runs towards the terrace.*

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Same as Scene I. It is several hours later.

The debris of dinner is being cleared away by
JENNY and BRISTOW.

BRISTOW: French, was he ?

JENNY: Yes, I must say this for foreigners . . . even though you can't understand a word they say, they do make you feel as though you were somebody.

BRISTOW: Do you usually feel as though you weren't anybody ?

JENNY: Not when you're around, Alfred ! (*Coquettishly*) When you're there, I feel proud of my position as the future Mrs. Alfred Bristow . . . I wonder if I'll make a good wife !

BRISTOW (*grudgingly*): No doubt you'll do your best !

JENNY (*wistfully*): I do wish I could cook, though.

BRISTOW: But, Jenny . . . you said you could !

JENNY: Did I ? (*Hurriedly*) I dare say I can if I try !

BRISTOW: You said you were a good cook.

JENNY (*with mock seriousness*): Oh, Alfred, how awful of me ! Perhaps I was talking of my sister, Rose. . . . Now, she is a good cook.

[*He looks hurt that she should have lied to him.*

Anyhow, you didn't want to marry me just because I could cook, did you?

BRISTOW: That's true!

JENNY: And I don't want to marry you just because you can buttle, do I?

[*She has moved towards him and is standing provocatively near him, waiting to be kissed.*

BRISTOW: Now, then, Jenny. . . . There is a time and a place for everything. . . .

JENNY: There's no time like the present!

[*He kisses her hurriedly and rather lightly.*

BRISTOW: That's enough of that now.

JENNY (*flings her arms about him*): Oh, no, it isn't. . . . Not nearly enough of it!

BRISTOW (*disentangling himself*): Jenny . . . control yourself!

JENNY: Very well, honeybunch! I'll try for the present. (*She lets him go: returns to her work.*) Sometimes I wish you had a bit of French blood in you, Alfred. . . .

BRISTOW (*having recovered his dignity*): Hurry up with those things, Jenny. Don't go to sleep, now.

JENNY (*pertly*): I don't want to hurry up. . . . After all, this is the only time I see you alone.

BRISTOW: Nonsense! We're together all day.

JENNY: But not *alone*! What with cook and that girl . . . we might as well be on Hampstead Heath. . . . (*Sadly*) I can't see that it's going to be much different when we *are* married—(*then, brightly*)—except that we will sleep together.

BRISTOW (*shocked*): Jenny!

JENNY: *After* we're married, Alfred!

BRISTOW: We might give up service.

JENNY (*sarcastic*): And starve to death, I suppose.

BRISTOW (*grandly*): I'm thinking of buying an hotel.

JENNY (*flippant*): The Ritz, I suppose. Just keep on thinking.

BRISTOW: I wish you'd take me serious.

JENNY: I take you as I find you, Alfred.

BRISTOW: Well . . . I'm being serious now.

JENNY (*sceptical*): Oh, Alfred . . . where would you ever get the money?

BRISTOW: You needn't worry about that! I'm suggesting it . . . aren't I?

JENNY (*excited. She almost upsets her tray of glasses*): An hotel! . . . I'm that excited, Alfred! . . . (*Suspiciously*) It is in London, isn't it? . . . I mean . . . you wouldn't like the country! Country gives me the creeps!

BRISTOW: It's in London, all right. Near the Blue Lion.

JENNY (*happily*): Oh, Alfred! Here . . .

[*She pours the dregs from all the glasses on her tray into one and hands it to him.*]

Drink to us, Alfred! . . .

BRISTOW: We'll have to be quick, then!

JENNY: Mr. and Mrs. Bristow! God bless us!

[BRISTOW downs his drink. JULIA enters from the terrace.]

JULIA (*coldly*): Have you finished, Jenny?

JENNY: Yes, madam.

[JENNY picks up her tray and exits.]

JULIA: You've . . . er . . . attended to Captain Trent?

BRISTOW: Yes, madam. He's coming down shortly.

JULIA: Thank you. (*After a pause. Diffidently*) Bristow, do you notice anything different about me? Any change since this afternoon?

BRISTOW (*slightly embarrassed*): No, madam . . . I can't say that I do.

JULIA (*thoughtfully*): Ah . . . but, then, it's part of your job not to . . . perhaps I haven't changed . . . I don't feel any different . . . I just feel that I should feel different.

BRISTOW: Yes, madam.

[BRISTOW is still standing there.]

JULIA: That will be all, thank you, Bristow.

BRISTOW: Yes, madam.

[Exit BRISTOW. HELEN, who has been standing just outside on the terrace, enters and watches him as he goes out.]

HELEN: How do you manage always to have such nice looking servants, Julia? Bristow is like a Greek god!

JULIA: I think it is important. After all, one does have to look at them. . . . All these old family retainers who doddle about on their last legs give me the jitters.

HELEN: How did you pick him up?

JULIA: He used to work for Harriet. She sent him around with a message one day and . . . well . . . he stayed.

HELEN (*shocked*): Julia! You are naughty. Didn't she mind?

JULIA: She hasn't spoken to me since. I can't tell you what a relief it's been.

HELEN: Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

JULIA: If it were anyone else but Harriet, I would be. She had it coming to her. Last year, I had a very nice butler and she completely demoralised him. He *hated* her. Every time she came to the house, he locked himself in the toolshed and sang hymns for hours!

[HELEN *laughs*. *Pause*.]

HELEN (*glancing towards the hall. Anxiously*): Where are those men?

JULIA: Give them time, dear.

HELEN: But they've been *hours*! . . . Armand seemed worried.

JULIA: He hates business interfering with his work . . . or, whatever you call writing poetry.

HELEN: I think it is lovely for him to do it, but does he ever sell any?

JULIA: No. He gives it away. But he does sell some. That man at Margot's . . . the one from the East . . . was thrilled to meet him. He said that Armand's poetry made Bali bearable!

HELEN: How was Margot's?

JULIA (*shrugs*): Unbelievable!

HELEN (*gossiping*): Was what's-his-name there?

JULIA: Only just!

HELEN: I don't see why Henry puts up with it. . . . She is so ugly and all these goings on! You'd think he would have left her years ago!

JULIA: I don't suppose he can bear to kiss her good-bye! . . . You know . . . the trouble with poor Margot is that she is neither a lady nor a . . .

HELEN: Don't say it, darling!

JULIA: She *looks* so extraordinary! The clothes she puts on that figure of hers!

HELEN: I never knew she had a figure. . . . I thought it was just a shape.

JULIA (*smiling reminiscently*): Charles was very funny about her . . . he ought to be rallying soon.

HELEN: If he's as bad as you say, I think it would be better if he didn't.

JULIA: Bristow has been plying him with strong black coffee . . . oodles of it. I want him to take me to the club.

HELEN: But if Nicky has to go to town, won't you stay and see him off?

JULIA: And wear ourselves out with desultory conversation!

HELEN: That's a word I'd never dare pronounce!

JULIA (*decisively*): Oh, Helen! . . . No . . . if Charles fails me, I'll go alone. I must recoup my losses.

HELEN: You'll never do that.

JULIA: I had a try before dinner. We popped in for a moment on our way back. A bank had run eighteen times. . . .

HELEN: Yes?

JULIA: I said "Banko." . . .

HELEN: Well?

JULIA (*grimly*): It's still running. . . .

HELEN (*sympathetically*): Oh, Julia . . . you must be down thousands! Aren't you worried?

JULIA: Not about that. I've got enough to worry about with Charles.

HELEN: I should think that was his worry.

JULIA (*shyly*): Not altogether!

HELEN (*looks curiously at JULIA*): What do you mean?

JULIA (*evasively*): Do you notice anything different . . . any change in me since this afternoon?

HELEN (*glances at her*): New make-up? Nice! It suits you.

JULIA: No . . . a fundamental change!

HELEN (*ruefully*): Oh, Lord! What's happened?

JULIA: No, no, not that. . . . Guess!

HELEN (*firmly*): Oh, no. If you want to tell me, tell me. . . . I refuse to play guessing games. . . .

JULIA (*with the air of a bomb thrower*): Well, then . . . I am going to be married again. I am engaged. . . .

HELEN: Who to?

JULIA: To Charles.

HELEN (*flabbergasted*): Julia! . . . To Charles?

JULIA: Yes, dear. Do you mind?

HELEN (*lightly*): Not if you don't.

JULIA: I'm in love with him . . . at least, I hope I am. Anyhow, he asked me to marry him at Margot's and I said I would.

HELEN (*taken aback*): Julia . . . I hope you'll be happy.

JULIA: Why not? It was rebound, of course . . . but I believe rebound marriages are often very happy.

HELEN: What do you mean . . . rebound?

JULIA: You have been refusing him for months.

HELEN: Nonsense.

JULIA: It's nice of you to say that, but I know. I've heard you. Anyhow, he followed your advice . . . he got very drunk.

HELEN: Julia . . . are you serious?

JULIA: Dead serious. I don't know how drunk he was or if he's forgotten.

HELEN: Of course he hasn't forgotten.

JULIA: I don't know. Just the same, I don't want to risk it. I'm going out before he comes in. . . . (*She moves towards the terrace.*) I'll be down in the arbour catching my death of cold. Will you remind him tactfully and send him out to me?

[*Enter NICKY.*

Do you mind?

HELEN: Of course not.

JULIA: And, Helen! . . . (*Embarrassed*) You'll let me know if he's forgotten. (*HELEN smiles and shakes her head.*)

[*JULIA goes.*

NICKY: Hello!

HELEN: Hello! . . . Have you and Armand finished for the night?

NICKY: Practically . . . and I don't have to go to town, after all.

HELEN (*pleased*): Oh, Nicky, that is good news. In that case, I shan't have to go into a decline. . . .

NICKY: Were you thinking of going into one?

HELEN: I can't see what else I could do if my Nicky were snatched away from me! . . . By the way, Nicky, did you notice any difference in Julia?

NICKY: She seems very spry. What do you have to let her know?

HELEN: About Charles.

NICKY: Charles?

HELEN: Apparently she is engaged to him.

NICKY: What !

HELEN: She is going to marry him.

NICKY: To Charles? (HELEN *nods*.) But I thought he was my rival !

HELEN: Apparently he got tight and proposed to Julia . . . she accepted him.

NICKY: Are you jealous, darling ?

HELEN (*angry*): What a beastly thing to say !

NICKY: Well, it was rather beastly of you to say he was tight when he proposed.

HELEN: But he was ! Julia told me so herself. . . . I've got a very pleasant job. I am to find out just how tight he was; to remind him if he has forgotten; and to send him out to her !

NICKY: Gosh ! She accepted him when he was tight ! . . . rather a fast one !

HELEN: Not at all. It's a good thing for Julia, and a very good thing for Charles.

NICKY (*maddeningly*): Oh ! . . . You are jealous !

HELEN (*coldly*): Let's not discuss it.

[*She moves away from him.*]

NICKY: Whatever you say. . . . What shall we discuss ? . . . The crops ? . . . (HELEN *gives a forced scornful laugh*.) Darling, do you hate me ?

HELEN: Of course I don't.

NICKY: You did just then . . . for a moment.

HELEN: I didn't. I thought you a bit insensitive, that's all.

NICKY: You didn't stop loving me . . . just for a split second ?

HELEN (*gaily*): Don't be silly. I can't. I love you and that's that. Nothing can stop it.

NICKY (*softly*): Nothing ?

HELEN: I'd like to see something try.

NICKY: Love is lovely, don't you think?

HELEN: Lovely. . . . Only I wish it weren't so common.

[Enter CHARLES. He has struggled into his dinner jacket, but looks somewhat shaky and hungover.]

. . . Hello, Charles!

NICKY: Hello, Charles.

CHARLES (*dully*): Hullo.

HELEN: How do you feel?

CHARLES: Like hell.

HELEN: Didn't you get your coffee?

CHARLES: All of it. I've never drunk so much coffee in my life. I'm practically coffee-logged.

NICKY: Well, have something to eat.

[NICKY makes a movement towards the bell.]

CHARLES (*shudders*): No, thank you.

HELEN: If I might be so bold as to make a suggestion. . . . What about a small drink . . . to tide him over?

CHARLES (*gratefully*): I hoped someone would suggest that.

NICKY (*pointing*): Well, there it all is. . . .
(CHARLES *pours himself a drink.*) By the way, Charles, congratulations!

CHARLES (*surprised*): Oh, thank you!

HELEN: Julia was telling us.

CHARLES (*vaguely*): Was she?

NICKY: Yes, rather. . . .

[Pause.]

HELEN: . . . It's very good news, Charles.

CHARLES: Isn't it?

HELEN: We're so glad for your sake.

CHARLES: Thank you.

HELEN: She looks so happy.

CHARLES: Does she? I'm so glad. . . . (*There is a pause. CHARLES feels impelled to say something. Apologetically*) Do you know . . . I don't know what the devil you're talking about. . . .

NICKY: About your engagement, of course.

HELEN: To Julia.

[CHARLES puts his drink down and takes hold of the back of a chair for support.

CHARLES: . . . Oh, that !

NICKY (*curiously*): What did you think we were talking about ?

CHARLES (*vaguely*): Something entirely different.

NICKY (*insistent*): Yes, but what ?

HELEN (*quickly, with an angry glance at NICKY*): Julia is outside in the arbour.

CHARLES: I'd better go to her.

[NICKY takes him by the arm and hands him his drink.

NICKY (*kindly*): You'd better finish this first.

CHARLES: Perhaps you're right.

NICKY (*brightly*): Well . . . when is the wedding to be ?

CHARLES: I don't know.

NICKY: I don't suppose you do . . . (HELEN glares at him.) I mean . . . Julia will decide on the date and all that sort of thing.

CHARLES (*meekly*): I suppose so.

NICKY: I didn't know you were "that way" about Julia !

CHARLES (*with dignity*): I've always been extremely fond of her. . . .

NICKY: Yes, I know . . . but . . .

CHARLES (*putting his glass down and pushing it away from him with a gesture of distaste*): I don't think I can manage any more of that.

[JULIA comes in.

JULIA: Helen . . . when he comes down . . .
(*She sees CHARLES. Embarrassed*) Oh, Charles, there you are !

CHARLES: Yes, Julia. . . . I was looking for you.

[HELEN and NICKY go out stealthily.

CHARLES } . . . Well . . . I . . .
JULIA }

[*They stop and smile vacuously at each other.*

CHARLES } . . . What were you . . . ?
JULIA }

[*They stop again.*

JULIA (*firmly. She feels that they are not getting anywhere*): What were you going to say ?

CHARLES: Nothing. What were you going to say ?

JULIA: Nothing.

CHARLES (*unconvincingly*): . . . I'm awfully glad that we're engaged, Julia. . . .

JULIA: Are you, Charles ?

CHARLES: Yes, rather. (*Unhappily*) It gives one such a feeling of security. . . .

JULIA (*unhappily—a little ashamed*): Oh, Charles !

CHARLES: I'm sorry I wasn't at dinner. . . .

JULIA: That's all right. Would you like something to eat now ? (*She is about to ring the bell.*)

CHARLES (*fervently*): No, thank you. Have you told Armand that we are engaged ?

JULIA: Not yet. (*She smiles.*) But he'll be pleased. . . . I know he likes you. . . .

CHARLES: We are engaged . . . aren't we ?

JULIA (*gently*): Yes, Charles. . . .

CHARLES: Yes, I thought so !

JULIA (*out of embarrassment*): Don't you want to kiss me ?

[*He doesn't want to, but he does so.*]

CHARLES: It's like a dream, really. . . .

JULIA (*sharply*): What do you mean ?

CHARLES: Us being engaged . . . and . . . and . . . Everything. . . .

JULIA: It isn't a dream, Charles. Pinch yourself to make sure.

[*Covertly—when she isn't looking—he does pinch himself.*]

CHARLES (*miserably*): I'm so happy. . . .

JULIA (*sitting on the sofa*): Shall we sit here where it's comfortable.

CHARLES (*sitting*): Helen said you were happy, too . . . but you don't look it.

JULIA (*with determination*): I am, Charles.

CHARLES: It's nice . . . being engaged. . . . I always envied Nicky and Helen. . . .

JULIA (*dryly*): Yes, Charles. . . . (*Impulsively*) Are you very much in love with her ?

CHARLES (*shocked*): In love with Helen ? Julia !

JULIA: But you have been for years.

CHARLES: I wish you hadn't said that.

JULIA (*gently*): I wouldn't take our engagement too seriously, Charles . . . if I were you. . . .

CHARLES: Why not ? Aren't you going to marry me ?

JULIA: I played rather a dirty trick on you . . . taking advantage of your intoxication. . . .

CHARLES (*stoutly*): You did nothing of the kind.

JULIA (*laughs*): Oh, Charles . . . you were so sozzled. . . .

CHARLES: I daresay I was . . . but . . . when the wine goes in then the truth comes out, Julia. . . .

JULIA: You mean . . . ?

CHARLES: It's difficult to say when I'm stone cold sober . . . but I am awfully fond of you, Julia. . . .

JULIA (*happily*): Oh ! . . . Charles. . . .

[*She takes his hand. They are sitting like this when HELEN and NICKY enter.*

HELEN (*gaily*): Oi !

JULIA (*coldly*): Don't be vulgar . . . go away !

HELEN: And freeze to death. . . . Not this child !

JULIA: Pay no attention to them, Charles. . . . Just act as if they weren't there. . . .

NICKY: Are we interrupting something rather beautiful ?

JULIA (*fiercely*): Go away !

HELEN (*coming further into the room*): If anybody freezes to death . . . it's not going to be me. . . . I don't want Nicky to die, either. . . .

[*She holds out her hand to him. He takes it, following her into the room.*

NICKY: We probably won't notice what you say or do. . . . We live in a world of our own, anyway. . . .

JULIA (*pettishly*): Go there and live in it. . . .

HELEN: We are. . . .

[*JULIA fidgets, takes CHARLES's hand firmly, and pretends to ignore them.*

ARMAND *comes in U.R.*

ARMAND: Where's Julia ?

HELEN (*quickly*): She's not here. . . .

ARMAND: What? (*Noticing JULIA and CHARLES*)
I want to read her this poem.

HELEN (*in an audible whisper*): You can't. . . .
She's engaged to Charles. . . .

ARMAND: Engaged to Charles?

HELEN: Sh! He's proposing to her. . . .

ARMAND: He must have done that already if
they're engaged. . . .

NICKY: He's doing it again to make sure. . . .

JULIA: . . . What is it, Armand?

ARMAND: Congratulations, Julia. . . .

JULIA: Thank you, dear. . . . But you ought to
congratulate Charles . . . not me. . . .

ARMAND: I do. Well, come on! Congratulations,
Charles!

CHARLES: Thank you.

ARMAND: Look after her. . . . It's a whole-time
job! . . .

CHARLES: Thank you . . . I will. . . .

ARMAND: And I hope you'll be as happy as you
deserve!

JULIA: I hope we'll be happier than that. (*She
laughs, self-consciously.*) What does everyone want
to do to-night? . . . My young man and I are
going to celebrate.

HELEN: Where . . . ? and how?

JULIA: At my little club. . . . And how!!!

NICKY: That sounds reckless!

CHARLES: We're feeling reckless!

HELEN: It seems you felt reckless once before
to-day!

CHARLES (*embarrassed*): What do you mean?

HELEN (*embarrassed*): I mean on the drive back
. . . after the party!

CHARLES: Oh ! (*He chuckles.*) You should have seen Armand. . . . The way he drove us back ! . . . I've never been so frightened in all my life. Have you, Julia ?

JULIA (*dryly*): No, dear . . . but you did the driving.

CHARLES (*amazed*): Me ! Are you sure ?

JULIA: Quite sure.

CHARLES: Good Lord ! I could have sworn it was Armand !

[*He looks at ARMAND who shakes his head. ARMAND leads NICKY towards the terrace and stands just outside the room talking to him.*]

CHARLES *helps himself to a drink.*

HELEN: Apart from the trip back, you enjoyed the party ?

CHARLES: I did rather. (*He laughs.*) I had a very funny experience. Someone told me that you and Nicky couldn't get married because he was a Hungarian !

HELEN (*scornfully*): What utter nonsense ! . . . I wonder who could have told you ?

CHARLES: I don't remember. (*He puzzles for a moment.*) Was it you, Julia ?

HELEN: Was it, Julia ?

JULIA: Isn't it true, then ?

HELEN (*laughs*): True ! I never heard anything quite so fantastic in all my life . . . unless he was pulling someone's leg.

JULIA: Just the same, why don't you get married ?

HELEN: I can't think of any reason why we shouldn't. You must ask Nicky. Perhaps he really is a Hungarian ! (*Calling to NICKY*) Are you, darling ?

NICKY (*coming back into the room*): Am I what ?

HELEN: A Hungarian ?

NICKY: I never felt better in my life. . . . (*Fiercely*)
Who says I am ?

CHARLES (*embarrassed*): I don't know who said
it . . . but someone told me to-day at the party !

HELEN (*lightly*): You shouldn't believe anything
you hear at parties—(*meaningly to JULIA*)—
especially cocktail parties.

ARMAND (*brandishing his poem*): I think I'll read
you this now.

JULIA: What ?

ARMAND: I think I'll read you this now.

JULIA: Yes, dear, I heard. What are you going
to read to us ? What is it ?

ARMAND: A bit of poetry !

JULIA (*pleased*): Poetry ! . . . Armand is going to
read us some poetry. . . . Is it . . . is it in honour
of us ?

ARMAND: Not particularly.

JULIA: Oh, well. Read it ! . . . Come and sit
here, everybody, while Armand reads us his
poem. (*In an audible whisper to the others*) It won't
take long. . . .

[*There is a certain amount of confusion as they
settle down to listen.*

*First of all they dispose of the coffee tray by passing
it from one to the other till, finally, NICKY puts it
on the drink table.*

ARMAND *clears his throat and gets ready.*

JULIA *takes a cigarette and CHARLES lights it for
her.*

ARMAND *glares at them.*

(*blandly*) Go on, dear ! . . . We're listen-
ing ! . . .

ARMAND: It's called "The Chronologist."

[JULIA *laughs uproariously*. CHARLES *joins in*.
HELEN *says* "Sh!"

JULIA: "The Chronologist"? What a funny title! What does it mean?

ARMAND (*sharply*): If you'd listen, perhaps you'd find out!

JULIA: Don't be pert, Armand. Nobody asked you to read us your poem. There's no need to be rude!

ARMAND: I wish you wouldn't interrupt all the time!

JULIA: You haven't started yet. We can't interrupt until you start. Go on!

ARMAND: . . . The Chronologist. . . .

JULIA (*suddenly*): Excuse me, Armand . . . but while I think of it, Helen . . . what did you do with my bracelet?

HELEN: Put it in the middle drawer as you told me.

JULIA: I looked all through it before dinner and it wasn't there. . . .

HELEN: Well, I put it there.

JULIA: I'll have another look later. . . . Go on, Armand. . . .

ARMAND: . . . The Chronologist. . . . (*He clears his throat and begins to read*) "I was a poet and I dreamed a dream. . . ."

HELEN: But, Julia, after you gave it to me, I put it on that chair. I had a talk with Nicky . . . then I went out into the garden . . . then I remembered, and came back and took it upstairs and put it in the chest of drawers where you told me.

NICKY: Perhaps you put it in the wrong chest of drawers.

Z .

HELEN: There is only one. I put it in the middle drawer in the left hand corner . . . underneath everything. . . .

JULIA: Well, I've turned everything out and it's not there. We'll look afterwards. . . . Go on, Armand. . . .

ARMAND (*grimly*): You'd better go and look now, Helen. Julia is sure to have looked in the wrong place.

HELEN: I think I will, if you don't mind, Armand.

[HELEN goes.

ARMAND *folds up his papers and puts them in his pocket.*

JULIA: Don't you want to read to us, Armand?

ARMAND: I've lost all incentive for it! After all, your jewellery is more important than my poetry!

JULIA: Obviously . . . but it's missing.

ARMAND: Then, why don't you do something about it?

JULIA (*serenely*): There's nothing I can do to-night. If it doesn't turn up to-morrow—I'll get into touch with the Insurance people and call the police.

ARMAND: Why not call them to-night?

JULIA: There's no need to get them out of their beds.

ARMAND: Why not? That's what they're there for.

JULIA (*laughs tolerantly*): They're there to sleep.

CHARLES: You take it very calmly, Julia.

JULIA: I have no choice, Charlie. What *can* I do?

ARMAND (*pettishly*): You can look for it.

JULIA: I have looked.

ARMAND: You can look again.

JULIA (*still with her air of patronising tolerance*): All right! All right! Don't be so peevish! If it pleases you, I will. Come and help me, Charles. . . . We'll look in all the most unlikely places.

[*Exeunt JULIA and CHARLES.*]

NICKY: This is rather scrious, Armand.

ARMAND (*cheered up now that JULIA is out of the room*): Not if you knew Julia. . . . She is always losing or mislaying things. She lost her first husband through gross carelessness . . . but usually things turn up again.

[*Enter HELEN. She looks worried.*]

HELEN: It's not there.

ARMAND: It's probably slipped down behind.

NICKY: Behind what?

ARMAND: Behind wherever Helen put it.

HELEN: It's rather worrying, isn't it?

ARMAND: I suppose I had better go and find it myself.

[*Exit ARMAND.*]

NICKY: What do you suppose has happened to it? Has it really disappeared?

HELEN: I'm afraid it has.

NICKY: It's lucky it didn't happen a few days ago or you'd have suspected me.

HELEN: Don't be silly, Nicky.

NICKY: Well, you might have. You had no reason to trust me. On the contrary! Even now, you haven't. . . . Except that we love each other. . . .

HELEN (*vehemently*): Don't talk such nonsense, Nicky.

[NICKY looks at her in silence for a moment.]

NICKY (*quietly*): Helen . . . you don't think . . . ?

HELEN (*avoiding his eyes*): Of course I don't.

NICKY: Because you mustn't. Look at me, Helen.

[*They face each other for a moment. HELEN smiles.*]

HELEN: See !

NICKY: We'll have to tell Armand about how I met you.

HELEN (*frightened*): Why? It's nothing to do with him.

NICKY: If the bracelet doesn't turn up and there's a police enquiry . . . something might come out which wouldn't sound too good and I'd be on the spot.

HELEN: But you're not a thief, Nicky !

NICKY: But for the grace of God and of you, I might be.

HELEN: I don't want to tell Armand.

NICKY: I think we should. Even if we don't tell him the whole truth, we ought to tell him part of it.

HELEN (*echoing him*): Part of it ! (*Unhappily*) Why don't you just give it back, Nicky ?

NICKY (*amazed*): What ?

HELEN (*quietly*): Why don't you give it back ? (*Scornfully*) There'd be no need to tell Armand the truth . . . or even part of it.

NICKY: I only suggested telling Armand because I thought the compromise would please you.

HELEN: And you felt so sure of me ?

NICKY (*quietly*): Yes, Helen, I felt sure of you.

HELEN: You thought I wouldn't doubt you?

NICKY: Yes.

[HELEN gives a forced, scornful laugh.]

NICKY: I suppose you think that I am going to make a getaway and never see you again.

HELEN: I suppose so.

NICKY: And that all I said to you this afternoon . . . about loving you . . . wasn't true?

HELEN: I don't know what to think.

NICKY: I do love you, Helen.

HELEN: Then give Julia back her bracelet.

NICKY: How can I when I haven't got it?

HELEN: Why do you persist in saying that?

NICKY: Because it happens to be the truth.

HELEN: Oh, don't be funny, Nicky.

NICKY: Was I being funny? You are . . . you're being extremely funny. (*After a pause. Slowly*) I would believe any lies you cared to tell me . . . (*moving away*) yet you can't believe me when I tell you the truth!

HELEN (*almost hysterical*): It's not the truth!

NICKY (*controlling himself with an effort*): Helen, I don't see how we are going to get anywhere by shouting at each other and getting hysterical. This is too important for that. Let's talk it over sensibly and quietly. (*He offers her a cigarette.*) Cigarette?

HELEN (*with a tremendous effort*): No, thank you.

NICKY (*lights the cigarette*): Now . . . you have it firmly fixed in your head that I am a thief and I say that I'm not. Which one of us are we going to believe?

HELEN (*wearily*): It's no use, Nicky.

NICKY: It's got to be some use. The whole of

our lives and our happiness is at stake. It's no good saying "It's no use"! We have got to do something.

HELEN: Nicky . . . why can't you just put it back without all this fuss? We can forget about it.

NICKY: Can we? I don't think we can forget so easily.

HELEN: We can try.

NICKY: What is there to try for? Good God, in a minute you'll have me admitting that I did steal the wretched thing.

HELEN: Why don't you? What sort of a fool do you take me for?

NICKY (*finally losing patience*): An utter damn fool!

[HELEN turns away. She is crying. Immediately, his temper disappears. He takes her in his arms to comfort her. He speaks to her tenderly as if she were a small child.]

Helen . . . Darling . . . I'm sorry. Stop crying! I love you, Helen, and that's all that matters . . . we love each other . . . this absurd nightmare will soon be over. . . .

HELEN (*clinging to him*): Oh, Nicky . . . it's so awful. . . .

NICKY (*soothing*): Yes, dear . . . but it will soon be over . . . very soon. . . . You do love me?

HELEN: I do! . . . I do! . . . Oh, Nicky. . . . (*She has almost stopped crying.*) I thought I'd lost you. . . .

NICKY: You'll never do that, Helen . . . however hard you try. Here . . . (*He dries her eyes with his handkerchief.*) . . . Blow! Better?

HELEN (*with a final sniff*): Thank you.

NICKY: You're very naughty to work yourself up into such a state . . . and to work me up into one. . . . As if I would take Julia's bracelet . . . or anyone else's !

HELEN: But, Nicky. . . .

NICKY: Yes ?

HELEN: You did, didn't you ?

NICKY (*angrily*): I thought that I'd persuaded you that I hadn't. . . . Good God ! What have you been crying for ? (*Then, more quietly*) I can see your side . . . up to a point. Can't you see mine ? Don't you want to ?

HELEN: But you can't have things the way you want *them*, just because you want *them* that way. . . . Facts . . .

NICKY (*interrupting*): There are no facts, Helen . . . just a set of circumstances and blind obstinacy on your part.

HELEN: Yes, but you . . . When we first met. . . .

NICKY: I was starving then. It's not as if I had ever stolen professionally.

HELEN: No ?

NICKY: You don't think it was the first time ?

HELEN (*tortured*): I don't know . . . I'm trying not to . . . I'm trying not to think at all.

NICKY (*sharply*): Under the circumstances, that's a great help. (*Then, after a pause, almost pathetically.*) If you really loved me, you'd trust me.

HELEN: Lots of women love men they don't trust.

NICKY (*bitterly*): When I came home at night, you'd go through my pockets to see what I'd stolen.

HELEN (*hysterically*): I'd cure you of the habit in time !

NICKY: You'd always doubt me. You'd never believe a word I said.

HELEN: I'd pretend to believe you !

NICKY: Pretend !

HELEN (*shouting*): How can I do anything else when you rob my friends——

NICKY: Helen !

HELEN (*sobbing*):—And then lie to me about it ? . . . (NICKY *goes towards the terrace. Frightened*) Where are you going ?

NICKY: I'm going out. . . . I'm going to get drunk. . . . After all, I am here to enjoy myself. . . .

[*Exit* NICKY.]

HELEN *flings herself on to the sofa and weeps hysterically.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

Same as Act II. A few minutes later.

[JULIA and CHARLES are playing bezique. CHARLES does not know much about the game, but JULIA knows more than enough.]

JULIA: Go on, dear. . . . Draw !! Now, discard ! . . . A hundred. . . . (*She snaps the score up on her board.*)

CHARLES: It's most irregular. . . .

JULIA: No, it isn't ! (*She points to her four aces on the table.*)

CHARLES: In a case like this, no one should leave the house until the police have had a chance to investigate . . . you know, take finger-prints, and all that sort of thing. . . .

JULIA: Yes, dear . . . Sixty ! . . . but aren't you thinking of a murder—not a robbery ?

CHARLES: The procedure is the same in any crime. . . .

JULIA: It's time enough to take finger-prints in the morning. . . . Discard now and forget about it !

CHARLES: Isn't this something ?

[He shows her his hand.]

JULIA (*coldly*): Your fourth bezique again. . . . (*As he fumbles with his score*) 5,000 up and 500 down. . . . (*Resentfully*) You are lucky, Charles !

CHARLES (*sentimentally*): Yes, aren't I ? (*He sighs.*)

JULIA (*alarmed*): What's the matter ?

CHARLES: I don't know. I feel so . . . so con-
tented. . . .

JULIA: That's the way you ought to feel.
Hold your cards up ! A hundred to say.

CHARLES (*playing with abandon*): So happy and at peace with the world. . . . Stop me if I'm talking too much. . . .

JULIA (*torn between the sentimental and the gambling instinct*): Oh, Charles. . . .

CHARLES: I'm afraid I get carried away when I'm with you. . . . I talk too much! . . . I don't want you to get bored with me. . . .

JULIA: Oh, Charles. . . . Draw!

[*Enter NICKY from the terrace. He is in a filthy temper, and it does not take him long to show it.*

Hello, Nicky. . . .

CHARLES: We thought you'd gone out.

NICKY (*rudely*): I had . . . and, now I've come in. . . .

JULIA: Where's Helen?

NICKY: Must you ask that?

JULIA: It's a perfectly civil question. Where is she?

NICKY: How should I know? (*Then, more calmly*) She is in the house somewhere.

CHARLES (*sympathetically*): She has probably had an attack of temperament.

JULIA: Sixty to say.

NICKY (*coldly*): I beg your pardon?

CHARLES: She has the hell of a temper.

NICKY: Will you please take that back?

CHARLES: It's perfectly true. I've known her longer than you have. She is temperamentally unbalanced.

NICKY: That is better than being mentally unbalanced.

CHARLES (*roused*): What do you mean by that?

NICKY: Ask Julia!

JULIA (*pouring oil*): Now, then . . . don't be childish, Nicky. Charles and I are just going to finish this game . . . by the way would you like to chouette?

NICKY: No, thanks, Julia. I think bezique is a silly game.

JULIA: You couldn't hate it as much as Charles does . . . but it's good for us . . . it helps us to concentrate. . . . What was I saying?

NICKY: Something about concentrating, Julia.

JULIA: No, no . . . something else . . . what was it, Charles?

CHARLES: I wasn't listening, dear. . . .

JULIA: Anyhow, Nicky, what are you and Helen going to do this evening?

NICKY: I haven't the vaguest idea . . . something frightfully jolly, I expect. . . .

[*He moves towards the door up R. He is playing with his keys. He is nervous and unhappy.*]

JULIA: Where are you off to now?

NICKY (*rudely*): I am going to study Chinese Philosophy, Julia. . . .

[*NICKY goes upstairs R. JULIA and CHARLES look after him in amazement.*]

JULIA: Well, everyone to their own taste! Sixty to say!

CHARLES: Let that be a lesson to us, Julia . . . never to quarrel. . . .

JULIA (*meekly*): Yes, Charles. . . .

CHARLES: Promise, Julia?

JULIA: Promise that we'll never quarrel! Why are we getting married? Of course, we will . . . we'll quarrel like nine o'clock. . . . I promise to love you, though . . . I'll always do that . . . (*looking at his hand ruefully*) in spite of everything. . . .

CHARLES (*sentimental*): Me, too, Julia . . . I shall always love you. . . . Poor Nicky ! It must be hell to be unhappily in love !

JULIA (*dryly*): Yes, dear . . . (*Returning to the game*) a hundred to say !

CHARLES: Helen can be so aggravating. . . .

JULIA: I'm sure she can. . . . Let's finish this off now. . . .

[*They concentrate on their bezique for a few moments.*]

JULIA: A hundred to say !

CHARLES: I take it . . . Fourth bezique again. . . .

JULIA (*coldly*): Good, Charles . . . two-fifty to say !

[*They continue to play. CHARLES scores steadily.*]

JULIA has "two-fifty to say" most of the time. . . . Finally she scores it and the game is over.

CHARLES: Congratulations, Julia ! But it's not much use playing this out ! I think I must win on this hand. . . .

JULIA: Let's see . . . Oh, yes . . . you win . . . (*Fiercely*) Damn !!

CHARLES: What is it ?

JULIA: I've gone to bed with eight hundred kings . . . that's all !! You do the scoring, Charles . . . I'll pay you in the morning. . . .

CHARLES: Wouldn't you like another game ?

JULIA: No, thanks, dear. . . . I know when I'm beaten. . . .

[*Re-enter NICKY.*]

NICKY: Helen must have gone to bed.

JULIA: What are you going to do ?

NICKY: I'm open to any suggestion—preferably something low and vaguely immoral. You're my hostess. What do you suggest ?

JULIA: I'm not suggesting anything. I'm not in the mood.

NICKY: Pity !

CHARLES (*who has been fumbling with the bezique markers*): Darling, you owe me one and fourpence. . . .

JULIA (*shocked*): What !

NICKY: Things have come to a pretty pass when a hostess refuses to entertain her guests . . . Ah, well ! I suppose I'll have to drink myself silly. . . . What about you, Charles ?

CHARLES (*about to say "Yes," coldly*): No, thank you !

[NICKY *helps himself to a drink. As he does so, he notices the picture which hangs above the fireplace. He stares at it.*

NICKY: You know, Julia, I'm quite a simple person, but I have one vice. It's not smoking, it's not drinking, and I hope it's not sex . . . but . . . every time I look at that picture, I feel I want to do something to it.

CHARLES: Do you, Nicky ? What ?

NICKY: I don't know, but I think I want to burn it.

JULIA: Well, you can't.

NICKY: Why not ?

CHARLES (*seriously*): Why did you buy it, Julia ?

JULIA: I don't know . . . the man who painted it was starving.

NICKY: I'm not surprised.

JULIA: I got it in Capri . . . but nobody likes it much. . . . Charles, dear, when we go on our honeymoon, let's go to some civilised place. Let's spend it in England in some four-star hotel. Let comfort be our only consideration. Poor Philip was romantic and insisted on

dragging Helen to Capri. Perhaps it was romantic, but he had hiccups intermittently for four days and it still irritates her when she thinks of it. Then she came out in a rash, and the drains didn't work. . . .

NICKY (*irritated*): I'd take Julia to Capri, Charles. She'd look lovely in a rash. It would suit you.

CHARLES: You can't talk that way to Julia.

NICKY: Can't I?

JULIA (*lightly*): He's only teasing. (*Kindly*) What's the matter, Nicky?

NICKY: I'm sorry, Julia. Don't mind me. I'd like to howl like a dog. Perhaps I need a powder.

JULIA: Are you depressed?

NICKY (*bitterly*): Depressed?

JULIA: Then we must cheer you up . . . ~~Make~~ you laugh. . . . Tell him a funny story, Charles.

CHARLES (*thinks for a moment, then*): Well, there was an old woman who lived in a shoe. She had so many children, because she didn't know what to do . . . obviously!

[JULIA looks expectantly at NICKY who is not amused.]

JULIA (*cheerfully*): Tell him another!

CHARLES: Well, the only other one I know is about two commercial travellers; but I'm not sure that I can remember the point.

NICKY: Don't bother, Charles.

JULIA: Oh, yes. Try to remember it.

NICKY (*sadly*): I'd rather be depressed, if you don't mind. I . . .

[Enter HELEN. She has regained her composure and is determined to be bright and gay as if nothing had happened.]

HELEN: Hello . . . No, don't move ! . . . Have you found your bracelet, Julia ?

JULIA: No. I don't think we will. We're trying to cheer Nicky up.

HELEN (*talking with birdlike artificiality*): You know, Julia, you made a mistake to have just one big room like this. It's too small . . . and with all these chairs it's like a cinema . . . always full of people . . . playing games . . . no privacy at all.

JULIA: If you want privacy, there's always the library. (*Pointing to the bezique table*) Put that away, Charles, will you ?

[CHARLES *puts it against the wall.*

HELEN: Yes, but it's such a *little* room ! Besides, I wasn't thinking of myself . . . I was thinking of you and Charles. It must be very difficult for you with people continually barging in. . . .

JULIA: Are you giving us a hint to go ?

HELEN (*laughs*): No, dear.

[JULIA and CHARLES *move towards the terrace.*

JULIA: You'll be pleased to hear that Charles and I are going to have a spot of romance in the garden.

HELEN: Don't go on our account !

[JULIA and CHARLES *go out.*

HELEN and NICKY *face each other for a moment.*

HELEN (*almost truculent*): Well ? . . . Why don't you say something ?

NICKY: I am rather short of small talk. Besides, it's your turn.

HELEN (*quietly*): I don't know where to begin. I've said so many things to you that I didn't mean. . . .

NICKY: You said you loved me.

HELEN: I meant that. It's the other things I didn't mean.

NICKY (*mocking and tenderly*): But you want a husband who makes you jealous and whom you can mistrust.

HELEN (*shakes her head*): I didn't mean that either. If I love you, I trust you automatically . . . and I do love you.

NICKY: Then there's nothing to be said.

HELEN: You might say you love me !

NICKY: Would you believe me ?

HELEN: I believe everything you say.

NICKY: You'd better . . . because I do love you.

[*They kiss.*

Enter ARMAND.

HELEN and NICKY move away from each other.

ARMAND: I beg your pardon. . . . Where's Julia ?

HELEN: I don't know—yes, I do. She's outside with Charles.

ARMAND (*disapprovingly*): Umm . . . She ought to do something about her jewellery instead of wasting her time with Charles.

HELEN: She doesn't think she is wasting her time. She's in love, Armand !

ARMAND: No !

NICKY (*laughs*): You're very scornful about it.

ARMAND: I mistrust love as I mistrust all collaboration.

HELEN: You don't know much about love if you think it's a collaboration !

NICKY (*gaily*): It's a struggle, Armand. It's like war.

HELEN: A surgical operation . . . without an anæsthetic !

NICKY: It hurts a lot, and yet it's very pleasant.

HELEN: It's like indigestion really.

ARMAND: Have you ever had indigestion ?

HELEN: Nothing very acute.

ARMAND: Well, you wouldn't joke about it if you had. . . . Oh, this place is rife with romance.

HELEN: There's no need to be cynical about it.

ARMAND: I'm the only person who can decently afford to be. I thought Julia was sickening for something, I'm glad it's only this. . . . Well, I suppose he seems a decent sort of fellow. . . .

NICKY: He'll make her a good husband.

ARMAND: He'll have to. It would kill Julia to get the worst of a marriage.

NICKY: Don't be so cold-blooded, Armand. Julia and Charles are in love just the same as Helen and I are. Love, Armand, love !

ARMAND: Love is a biological necessity.

HELEN: And you call yourself a poet !

ARMAND: Exactly. And I'm a business man, too, remember ! Why do you think people fall in love ?

HELEN: We don't think, we know, don't we, Nicky ?

NICKY: We do, indeed.

HELEN (*sentimentally*): People fall in love because—somewhere in a book that we know far too little about—it is written they shall meet and love and live happily ever after.

ARMAND: Finding children under gooseberry bushes, I suppose ?

NICKY: Why not ? It's a very pretty idea.

ARMAND: Charming ! I think it's time you two knew the facts of life. I'll try to enlighten you.

HELEN: This is going to be very nasty. You mustn't hear this. All right ! Tell us, Armand. See if we mind ! (*She puts her fingers to NICKY's ears.*)

ARMAND: I'm not going to bother to tell you, if you're not going to bother to listen.

HELEN: I'll let him listen. That was just a gesture.

ARMAND: Well, then ! People fall in love because they're lonely or unhappy or bored, and because they alleviate each other's loneliness or unhappiness or boredom, and that's the truth !

NICKY: Truth ! I never heard anything untrue ! Because I know that, however happy I might have been before I met Helen, she has made me much, much happier. She is the sun and the moon and the stars, and if that isn't a declaration of love, I don't know what is.

HELEN (*softly*): Thank you, Nicky !

[*Enter JULIA. She hardly notices the others. She goes straight to a cigarette-box on one of the little tables and takes a handful of cigarettes.*]

ARMAND: Julia, what are you doing ?

JULIA: Getting some cigarettes. . . . We're sitting in the arbour.

ARMAND: Don't you think it's about time you came down to earth and became practical ?

JULIA: I am being practical. . . . The arbour is a mass of mosquitoes . . . we're going to smoke them out. (*She looks around for matches.*) Matches ? (*NICKY hands her a box from his pocket.*)

ARMAND: I mean about your bracelet. What have you done about it ?

JULIA (*vaguely. Anxious to get away*): I haven't found it.

ARMAND: We ought to have the police in.

JULIA: We can do that in the morning. I've got my hands full to-night.

ARMAND: We ought not to waste any time . . . if you're sure it's missing.

JULIA (*sharply*): What do you mean—"If I'm sure it's missing"? Of course, I'm sure. We've all looked for it.

ARMAND: Well then . . . ?

JULIA: What do you think, Nicky?

NICKY: I agree with Armand.

HELEN: Need you call the police?

JULIA (*anxiously*): Oh, yes, we must. The first question the Insurance ask is always, "Did you inform the police?"

HELEN: But there'd be no need to if I bought you a new bracelet!

JULIA: My dear, there's no need for you to do that. The Insurance will pay.

HELEN: Don't bother the Insurance. It was all my fault. I've said I'll get you another one.

[NICKY looks at her unhappily. He realises that she doesn't trust him after all.]

JULIA: But, my dear, don't be absurd. I don't want any others . . . I want the money. . . . I've paid hundreds of pounds in premiums.

HELEN (*desperately*): But you don't want the police hanging about. It makes such a scandal!

JULIA: There's nothing very scandalous about losing a piece of jewellery! Well, I must be off.

[HELEN feels she is beaten, and turns away with a sob of unhappiness.]

You do what you like about the police, **Armand**.
. . . I must get back to Charles or he'll be eaten
alive !

ARMAND : Yes, but . . .

[*Exit* **JULIA**.]

NICKY : Poor Helen ! So you can't trust me !

HELEN (*defiantly*) : I can. I do. . . .

NICKY : Armand. . . .

HELEN (*fiercely*) : Don't listen to him,
Armand. . . .

NICKY : Why were you so frightened about the
police ?

HELEN : I wasn't frightened . . . I just felt that
. . . well, that it isn't necessary to call them
in. . . .

ARMAND : Why, Helen ?

HELEN (*confused*) : I just . . .

NICKY (*sharply*) : You just didn't want them to
ask me any awkward questions. . . . Was that
it ?

HELEN : Partly . . . yes.

NICKY : Then you don't trust me ?

HELEN : Yes, I do. Only . . . for the moment . . .

NICKY (*angry*) : For the moment, you didn't ?

HELEN (*tortured, pleading to him*) : Don't be so
fierce about it, Nicky . . . I can't help it . . . I
don't think it myself . . . but I don't want to
give other people a chance to think it.

ARMAND : What are you two talking about ?

NICKY : Helen thinks that I have stolen Julia's
bracelet . . . that's all.

HELEN : Don't listen to him, Armand. He's
talking nonsense.

ARMAND: I think he must be. Why should she think so?

NICKY: She's got good enough reasons. . . . The first time I met her, I had gone to her flat to steal. . . .

HELEN: He was starving and out of a job. . . .

NICKY: I had your jewels in my pocket.

ARMAND: But I thought that you two were going to be married?

NICKY: That was make believe. We pretended I was because she was angry with Charles and felt sorry for me.

ARMAND: But . . . all that about meeting in Paris . . . ?

NICKY: Lies, Armand. . . . The whole thing was just a pack of lies. . . .

ARMAND (*flabbergasted*): Is this true, Helen?

HELEN (*angrily*): Yes, it is. But it's Julia's fault as much as mine.

ARMAND: Julia's fault! Does she know?

HELEN: No . . . but if it hadn't been for her insatiable curiosity in coming around that night I'd never have seen him again.

ARMAND: I see. . . . (*Correcting himself*) I don't see at all, really. If you are only pretending to be in love, why are you so worried about what other people think, Helen?

HELEN (*scornfully*): I am not just "pretending" to be in love. I *am* in love.

ARMAND: Oh.

HELEN (*fiercely*): And if you do anything . . . anything . . . to hurt Nicky or to get him into trouble . . . I don't know what I'll do. . . .

ARMAND (*embarrassed*): Well . . . what could I do? Unless he really has taken Julia's bracelet?

HELEN (*fiercely*): Of course he hasn't!

ARMAND (*shrugging*): Well, then . . . I can't see why I have been dragged into it. . . .

NICKY: I thought it only fair for you to know.

ARMAND: It's none of my business. The trouble with you people in love is that you want to drag everyone else into every scene that you have. You like to dramatise yourselves. (*To Nicky*) What makes you think that Helen thinks you are a thief? She has just told us that she doesn't.

NICKY (*grimly*): Yes . . . but she doesn't behave as if she didn't!

ARMAND (*slightly exasperated*): But she loves you!

NICKY: I want her to trust me . . . completely. That's not very much to ask.

ARMAND: Not very much to ask! (*He chuckles*) You don't know very much about women. Why . . . it's everything!

HELEN: I'm sorry, Armand, that I've gathered you. . . . But . . . (*warningly*) don't you dare tell Julia!

ARMAND (*piously*): Good Lord, no!

HELEN (*grandly*): I think you've been extremely silly, Nicky, if I may say so! . . . I shall go and get ready for the police. Let me know when they arrive.

[*Exit HELEN.*]

NICKY: I'm very sorry about this.

ARMAND: Love is very difficult. That's why I keep out of it.

NICKY: Yes . . . but I mean about what I told you . . . about the way that I first met Helen.

ARMAND: Oh, that! . . . (*He frowns.*) You really shouldn't have told me that.

NICKY: But, it's true.

ARMAND: It has nothing to do with me.

NICKY: You gave me a job because Helen introduced us.

ARMAND (*shakes his head*): Because I liked you and thought you capable. I still do.

NICKY: But . . . now that you know. . . .

ARMAND: What difference can it make?

NICKY: You won't be able to believe in me.

ARMAND: Why not? You've been working for me for some time, and you've had plenty of opportunities to appropriate property far more valuable and easily negotiable than Julia's diamond bracelet. You haven't taken advantage of those opportunities, have you?

ARMAND: That's what I thought!

NICKY: And you, Armand. . . .

ARMAND (*kindly*): I shouldn't let the fact that Helen had a momentary doubt about you worry you. . . . After all, it was momentary. . . . Implicit faith is an awful lot to ask of anyone . . . especially of a woman.

NICKY: Oh, Armand, you're just trying to console me with words!

ARMAND (*kindly and quizzically*): . . . There is a certain amount of experience behind the words. I am very fond of my sister Julia. . . . I realise—as no one else does—her faults and her limitations. She has so many that I sometimes wonder that I can bear the sight of her . . . but they don't prevent my loving her. . . . You see, our mother died when she was nine. I was about five years older. After her death, our father didn't bother about us, and Julia grew up without the slightest idea of how to discriminate between right and wrong. (*He smiles ruefully.*)

She had two methods of getting her own way. She would either coax or bully. She always got what she wanted. If it was something belonging to me, she would put her sticky little hand in mine and ask for it. I usually gave it her, because I knew that if I didn't, she would take it and swear that I *had* given it to her. She was an awful child !

NICKY (*slightly embarrassed*) : Yes . . . but she has outgrown it all !

ARMAND : No. She's exactly the same. . . . (*He breaks off. Thinks for a moment.*) What I mean is that when you love a person, you sometimes think in the very depths of your mind that they're not really worth it. . . . You'd never admit it, but you can't help thinking—(*correcting himself*)—feeling it . . . and it doesn't stop you loving them at all.

NICKY : You mean that Helen can't help mistrusting me ?

ARMAND : " Mistrust " is too strong a word.

NICKY : I can't see why you've bothered to tell me all this about Julia.

ARMAND (*apologetically*) . Perhaps I shouldn't have . . . but I think . . . I feel—(*he has difficulty in admitting what he does feel*)—that Julia knows more about what has happened to her bracelet than anyone else.

NICKY (*laughs*) : Nonsense, Armand.

ARMAND (*soberly*) : I hope so . . . but I am not going to send for the police until I am quite sure that she hasn't just mislaid it so that she could claim the insurance and pay her idiotic gambling debts.

[NICKY is about to expostulate.

(*Defensively*) She isn't dishonest . . . she's just . . .

NICKY : That doesn't alter the fact that Helen . . .

ARMAND (*interrupting*): Helen loves you, Nicky. You ought to let her love you in her own way, and be grateful for it. . . . What a platitude! (*He smiles ruefully.*) Sorry! . . . You don't realise how lucky you are! . . .

[ARMAND goes out to the terrace.

NICKY stands still for a moment. He picks up the drink which he had poured for himself earlier on and drains the glass at one gulp. Then he hurls the empty glass into the fireplace with a gesture of disgust, and walks about the room restlessly.

After a moment, JENNY enters.

JENNY: I beg your pardon, sir, but I thought I heard a—

NICKY: I'm sorry, Jenny, I broke a glass. (*Pointing to the fireplace*) Would you mind . . . ?

JENNY: Certainly, sir. (*She begins to pick up the pieces.*) Oh, well, sir, accidents will happen.

NICKY: It wasn't an accident.

JENNY (*cheerfully*, *She thinks he must be mad*): No, sir?

NICKY (*resentfully*): You seem very cheerful.

JENNY: I am, sir. I'm going to be married.

NICKY: Are you in love?

JENNY: Of course, sir.

NICKY: Well, I hope you'll be happy.

JENNY: Thank you, sir, I will.

NICKY: You will if you trust him.

JENNY: I do, sir.

NICKY (*cynically*): Sure?

JENNY: Yes, sir.

NICKY: That's all right.

[JENNY thinks over what NICKY has said, and it worries her.

JENNY: What's the matter, sir? . . .

NICKY: Nothing, nothing!

JENNY (*anxiously*): Have you lost something?

NICKY: No, no, I haven't.

JENNY: Is anything missing, sir?

NICKY: I was just talking nonsense.

JENNY (*insistent*): Yes, sir . . . but *is* anything missing?

NICKY (*reluctantly*): Mrs. Britton's bracelet has been mislaid.

JENNY (*bitterly*): Oh! . . . I knew it . . . I knew there was something fishy. . . .

NICKY (*surprised*): What is it, Jenny? . . . What's the matter?

JENNY: Alfred's the matter. . . . ~~that~~ it is, sir. . . .

NICKY: Alfred?

JENNY: Bristow . . . I might ~~have~~ known it. .

NICKY: What about Bristow?

JENNY: He's taken it. . . . He wants me to marry him. . . . He ought to know that I wouldn't marry him . . . not like that . . . him and his hotel. . . .

NICKY: What makes you think he's taken it?

JENNY (*struggling with her emotions*): Oh, he's done it before, sir. . . . He promised me he wouldn't do it again, but there you are. . . . You see, sir, Alfred got me this place. We were in the same situation together in London. He got into trouble there, lost a lot of money to the bookies, and when he couldn't pay for it, he took something that didn't belong to him. The lady was very nice about it, and didn't make much trouble. But, you see, sir—

[*She starts to cry.*]

NICKY: I see, Jenny!

JENNY: I suppose they've sent for the police?

NICKY: Not yet.

JENNY: They will, though.

NICKY: Only if they can't find it. (*Kindly*) You must get him to put it back.

JENNY (*grimly*): He'll do that all right, and then he'll get the sack. . . .

NICKY: Why? Why should he?

JENNY: Why shouldn't he?

NICKY: Nobody knows that he has taken it.

JENNY (*deeply moved*): Oh, sir! . . . You are good!

NICKY: Jenny?

JENNY: Don't have him sent away? . . .
Oh,

[*In embarrassment, NICKY pats her on the head. Instinctively, she cuddles up to him.*]

Enter HELEN.

HELEN: WELL!!!!

NICKY: Ssh!

HELEN: I'll not shush. . . .

JENNY (*sees HELEN and turns to NICKY with a cry of alarm*): Oh, sir!

NICKY (*conciliating*): Helen . . . your dignity!

HELEN (*furious*): Never you mind about my dignity . . . I want to know what's going on here. . . .

[*No one answers.*]

NICKY (*apologetic to JENNY*): I think we'll have to tell her . . . if you don't mind.

JENNY: Oh, no !

NICKY: She won't tell anyone è something ?

[JENNY *nods assent*.

(To HELEN) You see, Jenny thin
has taken Julia's bracelet. . . .

HELEN (*still a bit sceptical*): Why ^{is} anything

NICKY: She's got the usual reason. . . . She's in love with h
something of the kind once befo bracelet has

HELEN (*sympathetically*): Poor
sorry ! How awful ! . . . I knew

NICKY: I've told her that if he p
back, there's no reason why ' ? . . . What's
know that he'd ever taken it an
happily ever after and forget . That's what it

JENNY (*fiercely*): I'll not forge

HELEN (*coaxing*): But, you
forget the whole thing a . . . known it. . . .
once. . . .

JENNY (*even more fiercely*): Forgive h.
never forgive him . . . never . . . to marry

HELEN: What good will that do, Jes_n and his wouldn't

NICKY (*correcting her*): Jenny ! Th
Jenny . . . not Jessie . . . (To JEN taken it ?
Jessie ! You must forgive him . . . al Oh, he's
wouldn't have taken it if it hadn't ed me he
you. . . . You

JENNY: But . . . he promised . . . were in

HELEN (*lightly*): What's a promise ? Di He got
promise always to love him ? to the

JENNY: I do . . . I do love 'im. . . . n. The

HELEN: Then you must forgive him. . . . make
in love spend half their time forgivi
other. . . .

[She starts to give him to-morrow . . .

NICKY: I see, to-morrow may be too late . . . Jenny ! . . . forgive him now . . .

JENNY: I suppose . . . All right, sir, I will . . .

NICKY: Not yet (her shoulder): That's right . . .

JENNY: They (singing with her tears): I can't tell you

NICKY: Only think you both are . . .

must get him . . . ARMAND are heard on the terrace.

JENNY (grimly): JENNY towards the door.

he'll get the same . . . him to put it somewhere near

NICKY: Why? . . . not actually in the same

JENNY: Why should I? . . . Thank you, sir !

NICKY: Nobody

JENNY (deeply): I mean, Jenny . . .
good ! . . . right . . .

NICKY: . . . I, Je . . . ARMAND from the terrace.

JENNY: . . . lovely down there . . .
Oh, sir ! . . .

[In embarrassment . . . mosquitoes, darling ;
Instinctively . . .

Enter HELEN . . . think Charles and I are fated

HELEN: We . . . one together . . . first of all, you

NICKY: So . . . out of here, and then Armand

HELEN: I . . . I wanted to speak to you.

JENNY (seeing about that bracelet, I have
of alarm): . . . to be found where Helen put it

NICKY (c . . . ready): Have you, Nicky? Why

HELEN . . . I don't know. I just have
dignity
here . . .

[No . . . not can't be very psychic, Nicky

NICKY (. . . the night looking for it and
to tell her . . . What do you want . . .

ARMAND: It's a purely private matter.

NICKY (*not wanting to leave them alone together*). Surely there's nothing you can say to Julia that you can't say in front of us?

ARMAND: There is.

HELEN: Come along, Nicky.

NICKY: I'm damned if I will.

JULIA: Oh, sir, must we order you off the premises?

HELEN: Come along, Nicky.

NICKY: It's beginning to look like
(*To ARMAND*) I tell you, you're making a great mistake! (*Then, lightly*) If this man annoys you, Julia, give us a shout. We'll be glad to help.

[NICKY and HELEN go out.]

JULIA: What do you want to know?
Is it about Nicky?

ARMAND (*the following scene*).
His discomfort makes him unduly nervous.
No, Julia, it's about you.

JULIA: What about me? (*Privately*) Don't you approve of Charles?

ARMAND: It's about your bracelet.

JULIA (*uncertainly*): Oh . . .

ARMAND: Are you sure it's lost?

JULIA: As sure as I can be. . . . We've looked everywhere for it. It was quite an insight into Charles's character to see some of the places where *he* looked.

ARMAND: You went to that club place before dinner, didn't you?

JULIA (*avoiding his eyes*): You know I did. You dropped me there.

ARMAND: Did you gamble?

JULIA: Yes, a bit . . . (*Indignantly*) Is this why you wanted to speak to me alone?

ARMAND: How much did you lose?

JULIA: Only "banco-ed" once. . . .

ARMAND: How much did you lose?

JULIA (*reluctantly*): A hundred and eighty pounds.

ARMAND: I see. And you lost racing to-day, didn't you? . . . How are you going to pay it, Julia?

JULIA: Well, I suppose I'll have to ask you to lend me the money.

ARMAND: Why haven't you, then?

JULIA: I just lost it.

ARMAND: You don't waste much time when you are in this sort of

trouble. To-night is different. I've been thinking about . . . Charles . . .

JULIA: I'm a bit frightened of coming to you.

JULIA: Well, of course, dear . . . you're so funny about money.

ARMAND (*hating to say it*): You didn't, by any chance, think that the money that the insurance company paid you for the loss of your bracelet would make it unnecessary for you to come to me?

JULIA: I hadn't occurred to me . . . but, of course, it would!

ARMAND: You didn't deliberately lose your bracelet with that intention, did you?

JULIA (*indignantly*): Armand . . . what are you suggesting?

ARMAND: I'm not suggesting anything. I'm asking you a question, Julia.

JULIA: You're accusing me of stealing my own jewels!

ARMAND: I want the truth . . . do you know where it is?

JULIA (*angry*): Of course I don't. So that's what you think of me, is it? I think you had better get the police now and have the whole thing cleared up. (*Bitterly*) Accusing your sister . . . ! That's the last straw! . . .

[Enter BRISTOW and JENNY. BRISTOW is *angry and determined*. JENNY is *nervous and a little frightened*.]

ARMAND: What is it, Bristow?

BRISTOW: May I speak to you, madam?

ARMAND: Will you come later?

BRISTOW: I'd prefer to do it now, madam. I don't mind.

JULIA: What's the matter, Bristow?

BRISTOW: I understand that you have lost your diamond bracelet, madam.

JULIA: Yes, Bristow. I have.

BRISTOW: Well, I wish to state, madam, that I am in no way concerned with its disappearance.

JULIA: No one thinks that you are, Bristow.

BRISTOW: Mr. Wright does, madam.

JULIA (*calling*). Oh, Nicky . . . come here. What is all this?

[NICKY, HELEN, and CHARLES *enter*.]

NICKY: What is all what?

BRISTOW. You were making accusations against me to Mr. Castle, sir.

(JENNY agreement.)

NICKY (m). Hardly accusations, Bristow!

BRISTOW. It is as may be, sir . . . but aspersions have been cast. I would like to vindicate myself, if you don't mind?

IA (vaguely). I don't mind at all, Bristow.

NICKY. What makes you think that you must have to vindicate yourself?

BRISTOW. Private reasons, sir, which—with permission—I will not divulge. (Almost as if to clear my name for the benefit of the audience who, I hope, will one day

be so embarrassed, but proud.)

NICKY. They're going to be married, aren't they? I'm so glad. . . . Congratulate me. (Shakes JENNY's hand.)

BRISTOW (m). Thank you, madam.

NICKY. I hope you'll be happy,

BRISTOW. You're very lucky!

BRISTOW. Thank you, madam. But to get back to the matter in hand. . . .

NICKY. Oh, yes. . . . You want to vindicate yourself? . . . Well . . . I think you can do that easily enough. . . . I'm sure you have as far as I am concerned . . . you'd be the last person I'd suspect. . . . I'm sure that no one else suspects you either. I'm sure Mr. Vaughan doesn't, do you, dear? So, if Mr. Wright will take back his accus . . . or . . . aspersions, will you think yourself vindicated?

BRISTOW. Thank you, madam.

NICKY (appealing): Nicky!

NICKY (*formally*): Of course I do! I take back my aspersions, Bristow!

BRISTOW. Thank you, sir.

JULIA (*with an air of triumph*): There! . . . now your name is quite clear! . . . Well! (*She sighs with relief—well pleased with herself*)

BRISTOW: Thank you, madam. And, now, Miss Castle and I wish to give notice.

JULIA (*as if she didn't quite hear*): What?

HELEN. They wish to give notice, dear.

JULIA (*forlorn*): Why?

BRISTOW. Because, madam, we do not wish to remain on a situation in which we are subject to the breath of scandal.

JULIA. Is that so, Jenny?

JENNY: Yes, madam.

JULIA: But there is no scandal.
Bristow.

BRISTOW. Begging your pardon, madam, we consider that the diamond and pearl jewellery is a scandal.

JULIA (*desperately*). But . . .
disappeared, Bristow!

[*All look at JULIA with various degrees of astonishment.*]

They were mislaid for a time, but I've found them again.

BRISTOW (*uncertainly*): In that case . . .

JULIA (*coaxing*): You'll stay?

[BRISTOW looks at JENNY, who nods.]

BRISTOW: We'll consider it, madam.

JULIA: Oh, thank you, Bristow! . . . Thank you, Jenny! . . .

BRISTOW: Thank you, madam.

JULIA: That'll be all.

[BRISTOW and JENNY go out.]

HELEN: I think you organised it very well, darling.

JULIA: Yes, you, dear! I thought it was pretty good myself . . . you know I couldn't have borne it if they had left. They're so good.

ARMAND: Were their references good, too?

JULIA: I didn't have any.

ARMAND: Then how do you know?

JULIA (with a squawk of indignation): You've got a nasty mind, Armand. When I can read a man's character on his face, there's no need to have it written down by some unbittered woman whom I don't know . . . whom I wouldn't trust

to do anything. I think a man who is as fond of his money as he is would do a thing like

that. He's not honest. It's mean and dishonest. He isn't.

ARMAND: I'm glad the bracelet has been found, Julia?

JULIA: Where?

JULIA: (Bursting out) . . . (There is general consternation, especially from HELEN and NICKY, who, until now had thought that BRISTOW had put the bracelet back and was pulling a bluff.)

(Plaintively) But it's bad enough to lose my jewels without losing my servants.

ARMAND: Why did you say you found it?

CHARLES: Yes, why?

JULIA: Why not? . . . (She looks towards the terrace and gives a sudden cry of alarm.)

CHARLES: What's the matter?

JULIA: A man!

NICKY: Where?

JULIA: He came up quite close to the window . . . When he saw that I had seen . . . he ran

CHARLES: We'd better go after him

[NICKY and CHARLES go out]

JULIA: Go on, Armand!

ARMAND (*hesitating*): Are you sure you saw him?

JULIA: Yes

ARMAND: Well, I was standing there and I didn't see anyone.

JULIA (*reassuredly*): You would . . . He's gone away . . . Run after him. Then . . . if you may be able to catch him. . . We'll be all right, dear

[ARMAND goes out.]

HELEN (*rather frightened*): Don't

JULIA: Yes, of course. . . The

HELEN: Quick! Take

[She produces the missing bundle and hands it to HELEN]

HELEN: Julia, your bracelet

JULIA: I had it all the time . . . I would have put me straight . . . Take it away and find it . . . The man dropped . . . Take it away and find it . . . Go the other way . . . (*Bundling HELEN off.*)

[Exit HELEN.]

JULIA sighs with relief.

After a moment, NICKY re-enters.

NICKY: I couldn't find anybody.

JULIA (*amazed*): Couldn't you?

NICKY: We thought we had—but it was Armand. Where's Helen?

JULIA: In the garden. She went that way—the other direction . . . she thought she saw someone, too. . . .

NICKY (addressed): In the garden! . . . Good-bye!
(he shouts as he goes out) Helen

[ARMAND reappears, colliding with NICKY.

ARMAND: What's the matter?

NICKY: It's Helen. She's out in the garden somewhere

[NICKY goes out.

ARMAND: What did he look like Julia?

JULIA: I don't know. . . . He had a little beard, I think . . .

CHARLES (entering):

JULIA (calling): Here's Charles! . . . Any luck?

CHARLES: He got away!

JULIA: He got away? A car down there on the road? . . .

CHARLES: Followed by NICKY.

JULIA (looking at her bracelet): Look!

JULIA: It's his.

NICKY: Did you find it?

HELEN: He dropped it . . . I ran after him and he dropped it. . . .

ARMAND: Did you see him?

HELEN: Not very clearly.

NICKY: Could you describe him?

HELEN: I don't know. . . . What would you say, Julia?

JULIA: I was too frightened to take him in.

ARMAND: Would you recognise him again?

HELEN (uncertainly. She is a little shaken by so many questions): I don't think so . . .

NICKY: How did he get away?

JULIA (*helping with a hint*): Charles heard him.

CHARLES: Yes, ye, I did.

HELEN: Yes, he got into a car.

NICKY: Did you see the number?

HELEN: Oh, no, I didn't. . . . You see, I bending down. . . .

JULIA (*nodding agreement*): Yes, she was down. . . .

HELEN: . . . to pick this up and I rather than saw it. (*Brightly*) It was like really!

ARMAND: Anyhow, you got the bracelet.

JULIA: . . . She was so brave so she like that!

HELEN (*grimly*): Thank you.

CHARLES (*puzzled*): What? . . . I is why the fellow hung about. . . . I must have taken the bracelet. . . . ago. . . .

JULIA (*taken aback*): Yes. . . . rather extraordinary. . . .

NICKY: It was probably the criminal returning to the seat of his crime. . . . (*Meaningly to HELEN*) He always does, you know. . . .

JULIA: Yes. . . . that must be it. . . .

ARMAND: Well, we don't know what the man looks like. . . . we can't describe the car. . . . don't think there's a chance in a million catching him. . . . I'm terribly sorry, Julia. . . . Will you forgive me?

JULIA (*magnanimously*): That's all right.

ARMAND: It had better be. . . .

HELENA is a bit bewildered that her story has
failed to deceive ARMAND. She smiles uncertainly.

ARMAND: It was very brave of you, Helena.

HELENA: Have?

ARMAND: (admiringly): Weren't you at all
frightened?

HELENA: (ily): I've never been frightened of
anything. David!

CURTAIN